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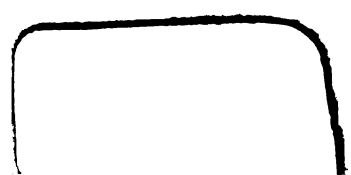
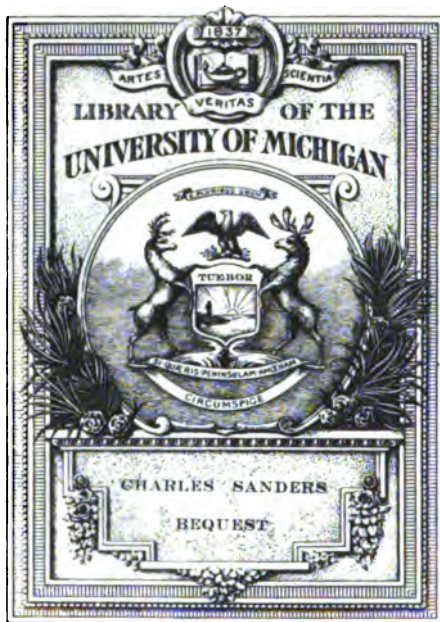
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HENRY IRVING

HENRY IRVING

A RECORD OF

TWENTY YEARS AT THE LYCEUM.

BY

Percy Fitzgerald
PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF GARRICK," "THE KEMBLE," "THE ART OF THE STAGE,"
ETC., ETC.

"As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next."

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD.

1893.

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Inscribed

TO

THE LADY DOROTHY NEVILL.

Leslie Sanders
Request
10-10-27

PREFACE.

ONE attraction in the life of an actor who has fought his way, and triumphed over many difficulties, in his struggles to eminence, is found in the spirit of adventure which so often marks his course. Such a story must be always gratifying and encouraging to read ; and we follow it now with sympathy, now with admiration. Nor is it without gratification for the actor himself, who must look back with complacency to troubles surmounted, and habits of patience and discipline acquired. In this severe and trying school he may acquire the practical virtues of patience, resignation, courage, perseverance, and the art of confronting difficulties ; he will cultivate restraint in the midst of apparent success. Even at the present moment, when the stage is presumed to be more flourishing than at any former period, the element of precariousness is more present than ever. Everything seems a lottery—theatres, pieces, actors. A theatre has gained a high reputation with one or two successful pieces : of a sudden

the newest play fails—or “falls,” as the French have it—to be succeeded by another, and yet another : each failing or “falling,” and seeming to prove that if nothing succeeds like success, nothing fails like failure.

There is a spectacle often witnessed in the region of the manufacturing counties, when we may be standing waiting in one of the great stations. A huge theatrical train containing one of the travelling companies, with all their baggage, scenery, etc., comes up and thunders through. Here is the “Pullman Car,” in which the performers are seen playing cards, or chatting, or lunching. They have their pets with them—parrots, dogs, etc. It suggests luxury and prosperity. But this ease is dearly purchased, for we know that the performer has bound himself in a sort of slavery, and has consented to forego all the legitimate methods of learning his profession. He belongs to some peripatetic company, a “travelling” one, or to some of the innumerable bands who take round a single play, for years, it may be ; and in it he must play his single character over and over again. Hence, he must learn,—nay, is compelled to play—every character in the same fashion, for he knows no other method. His wage is modest, but constant ; but he can never rise higher, and if he lose his place it will be difficult for him to find another. It will be interesting to see what a contrast this system offers to the course of our

cultured actors, who have endured the iron training and discipline of the old school ; and in this view we shall follow the adventurous career of the popular Henry Irving, admittedly the foremost of our performers. In his instance we shall see how the struggle, so manfully sustained, became an invariable *discipline*, slowly forming a character which has made him an interesting figure on which the eyes of his countrymen rest with pleasure : and developing, as I have said, the heroic qualities of patience, resolution, and perseverance.

At the same time, I do not profess to set forth in these pages what is called " a biography " of the actor. But this seems á fitting moment for presenting a review of his artistic, laborious work at the Lyceum Theatre, during a period of over twenty years. The pause which will follow his long absence abroad seems to mark the close of an era, and suggests a favourable opportunity for taking stock of the exertions which have influenced the public taste in so marked a way.

Having known the actor from the very commencement of his career, and followed his course ; having seen him in all his characters ; having written contemporaneous criticisms of these performances ; I may be thought to be at least fairly qualified for undertaking such a task. I possess, moreover, a vast collection of what may be called *pièces justificatifs*, which includes almost everything that has been written of the actor.

It will be seen that the tone adopted is an independent one, and I have freely and fairly discussed our actor's merits, both real and imputed. Where praise is indiscriminating there is no praise. I have also dealt with many interesting "open questions," as they may be called, connected with theatrical management and the "art of the stage."

Athenæum Club,
April, 1893.

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HENRY IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

1838—1856.

SCHOOL-DAYS—EARLY TASTE FOR THE STAGE—FIRST APPEARANCE.

HENRY IRVING was born at Keinton, near Glastonbury, in Somersetshire, on February 6, 1838. His true name was Brodribb, and he was christened John Henry. The system of assuming a stage name belongs to modern times; and, though Garrick made his early appearances as "Mr. Lyddal," it was with the view of concealing his performances from his family, and he speedily resumed his own name. This may have been the origin of the custom, as it used to be considered a loss of caste for any one of genteel birth to go on the stage; while those afflicted with inharmonious names were glad to adopt others more attractive and euphonious.

Henry Irving's mother was Sarah Behenna (good dramatic name), a woman of strong, marked character, who early took the child into Cornwall to her sister

Penberthy. We might seem to be beginning the first chapter of a Cornish romance. Among the miners and mining captains was he thus reared, in a district "stern and wild," where lessons of dogged toil and perseverance were to be learned. The earliest books he read were his Bible, some old English ballads, and *Don Quixote*, a character which he has long had a fancy for performing.

He was early sent to a school, then directed by Dr. Pinches, in George Yard, Lombard Street, a locality which offers a special interest ; for here, at the George and Vulture, which still happily stands, Mr. Pickwick always put up when he was in town. At this academy he is recollected as having been eager to display his histrionic gifts, and on some exhibition day proposed to recite a rather gruesome piece called *The Uncle*, to which his preceptor strongly objected ; he substituted the more orthodox Curran's *Defence of Hamilton Rowan*.

More than thirty years later, when the boy had become famous, and was giving a benefit at his own theatre to a veteran player—Mr. Creswick—the latter, coming before the curtain, related to the audience this little anecdote. "I was once," he said, "invited to hear some school-boys recite speeches previous to their breaking up for the holidays. The school-master was an old friend of mine, whom I very much respected. The room was filled from wall to wall with the parents and friends of the pupils. I was not much entertained with the first part : I must confess that I was a little

bored ; but suddenly there came out a lad who at once struck me as being rather uncommon, and he riveted my attention. It was a difficult task that he had to accomplish. The performance, I think, was a scene from 'Ion,' in which he played Adrastus. I well saw that he left his school-fellows a long way behind. That school-boy was Master Henry Irving. Seeing that he had dramatic aptitude, I gave him a word of encouragement, perhaps the first he had ever received, and certainly the first he had received from one in the dramatic profession, to which he is now a distinguished honour." The late Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Clarke, who was sent to the school after Irving left it, long after made humorous complaint at a Theatrical Fund dinner that, on exhibiting his own powers, he used to be regularly told, "Very good—very fair ; but you should have heard Irving do it."

On leaving the school it was determined that the future actor should adopt a commercial career, and he was placed in the offices of Messrs. Thacker, "Indian merchants in Newgate Street," a position attained, apparently, without difficulty. He was then about fourteen, and remained in the house four years.¹

¹ Some time ago a gentleman was purchasing photographs from a dealer in St. John's Road, when the latter mentioned that he had been employed in the warehouse of Messrs. Thacker at the time the actor was in their house of business. "He used to fine us boys a halfpenny for mispronouncing words." Then followed this characteristic criticism: "I have never seen him, but he appears to be a popular favourite ; though, from all I hear, he was a much better clerk than he is an actor." This recalls the property-man's compliment to

But his eyes were even now straying from his desk to the stage. He read plays and poetry, and was presently seeking opportunity for practice in the art in which he felt he was destined to excel.

At this time, about 1853, the late Mr. Phelps' intelligent efforts, and the admirable style in which he presented classical dramas, excited abundant interest and even enthusiasm among young men. Many now look back with pleasure to their pilgrimages to the far-off Sadler's Wells Theatre, where such an intellectual entertainment was provided and sustained with admirable taste for many seasons. The influence of this excellent teaching was more deep and lasting than is generally supposed. What was called "The Elocution Class" was one of the results. It was directed by Mr. Henry Thomas with much intelligence, whose system it was to encourage his pupils to recite pieces of their own selection, on which the criticisms of the listeners were freely given and invited.

"On one evening," says one of Irving's old class-fellows, "a youth presented himself as a new member.¹ He was rather tall for his age, dressed in a black suit, with what is called a round jacket, and a deep white linen collar turned over it. His face was very handsome, with a mass of black hair, and eyes bright and

Dickens: "It's universally said in the profession, sir, that if you hadn't taken to writin' you'd have made a name for yourself on the stage."

¹ Described by one of his biographers as "Henry Irving, a gentleman well known in the world of Art."

flashing with intelligence. He was called on for his first recitation, and fairly electrified the audience with an unusual display of elocutionary and dramatic intensity."

Of course the new member was Henry Irving. By and by the elocution class was moved to the Sussex Hall in Leadenhall Street, when something more ambitious was attempted in the shape of regular dramatic performances. The pieces were chiefly farces, such as 'Boots at the Swan,' or 'Little Toddlekins'; though more serious plays were performed. It was remarked that the young performer was invariably perfect in his "words." In spite of his youth he gave great effect to such characters as Wilford in 'The Iron Chest,' and others of a melodramatic cast. A still more ambitious effect was 'Tobin's Honeymoon,' given at the little Soho Theatre with full accompaniments of scenery, dresses, and decoration; and here the young aspirant won great applause.

It was to be expected that this success and these associations should more and more encourage him in his desire of adopting a profession to which he felt irresistibly drawn. He was, of course, a visitor to the theatres, and still recalls the extraordinary impression left upon him by Mr. Phelps' performances. In every one's experience is found one of these "epoch-making" incidents, which have an influence we are often scarcely conscious of; and every thinking person knows the value of such "turning-points" in music or literature. The young man's taste was no

caprice, or stage-struck fancy ; he tried his powers deliberately ; and before going to see a play would exercise himself in regular study of its parts, attempting to lay out the action, business, etc., according to his ideas. Many years later he said, in America, that when he was a youth he never went to a theatre except to see a Shakespearian play—in other words, except for instruction.

At Sadler's Wells there was a painstaking actor called Hoskins, who was attracted by the young fellow's enthusiasm and conscientious spirit, and agreed to give him a few lessons in his art. These were fixed for eight o'clock in the morning, so as not to interfere with commercial business. Hoskins introduced him to Phelps, who listened to his efforts with some of that gnarled impassibility which was characteristic of him ; then, in his blunt, good-natured way, gave him this advice : "Young man, have nothing to do with the stage ; it is a bad profession !"

Such, indeed, is the kindest counsel that could be given to nine-tenths of the postulants of our time. Their wish is to "go on the stage"—a different thing from the wish to become an actor. The manager had nothing before him to show that there were here present the necessary gifts of perseverance, study, and intelligence. Struck, however, by his earnestness, he proposed to give him an engagement of a very trifling kind, which the young man, after deliberation, declined, on the ground that it would not afford him opportunities of thoroughly learning his

profession. The good-natured Hoskins, who was himself leaving the theatre to go to Australia, gave him a letter to a certain manager, with these words : " You will go on the stage ; when you want an engagement present that letter, and you will obtain one." He, indeed, tried to induce him to go with him on his tours, but he declined.

His mother, however, could not reconcile herself to his taking so serious a step as " going on the stage." " I used frequently," writes his companion at the elocution class, " to visit at her house to rehearse the scenes in which John and I were to act together. I remember her as being rather tall, somewhat stately, and very gentle. On one occasion she begged me very earnestly to dissuade him from thinking of the stage as a profession ; and having read much of the vicissitudes of actors' lives, their hardships, and the precariousness of their work, I did my best to impress this view upon him." But it is ever idle thus striving to hinder a child's purpose when there are signs that it has been deliberately adopted. The sagacious parent will yield rather than oppose, when he finds that it is no childish whim or humour. Otherwise there will probably be a general failure in the purpose of life.

Having come to this resolution, he applied earnestly to the task of preparing himself for his profession. He learned a vast number of characters ; studied, and practised ; even took lessons in fencing, attending twice a week at a school of arms in Chancery Lane.

This accomplishment, often thought trifling, was once an important branch of an actor's education; it will supply an elegance of movement and bearing. He has since found his account in having mastered this graceful accomplishment. Indeed, as the stage is a place of exhibition, everything that is done upon the stage becomes important and significant, and cannot be done too well. Everything there becomes an *expression*—walk, air, everything has, or should have, its meaning. It has even been said: "Nothing is so difficult as to do nothing on the stage when you have nothing to do."

"The die being now cast," according to the accepted expression, John Brodribb, who had now become Henry Irving, bade adieu to his desk, and bethinking him of his Hoskins letter, applied to Mr. Davis, a country manager, who had just completed the building of a new theatre at Sunderland. With a slender stock of money he set off for that town. By an odd coincidence the name of the new house was the Lyceum. The play appointed was 'Richelieu,' and the opening night was fixed for September 29, 1856. The young actor was cast for the part of the Duke of Orleans, and had to speak the opening words of the piece.

Mr. Alfred Davis, a well-known provincial actor, and son of the northern manager and actor, often described the burning of this Lyceum Theatre at Sunderland. He recalled the circumstances attending Irving's "first appearance on any stage," which took

place on the completion of the theatre. "The new theatre," he says, "was opened in September 1856, and on the 29th of that month we started. For months previously a small army of scenic artists had been at work. Carpenters, property-makers, and, of course, *costumiers*, had been working night and day, and everything was, as far as could be foreseen, ready and perfect. Among the names of a carefully-selected *corps dramatique* were those of our old friend, Sam Johnson (now of Lyceum Theatre, London); George Orvell (real name, Frederick Kempster); Miss Ely Loveday (sister of H. J. Loveday, the present genial and much-respected stage-manager of the Lyceum), afterwards married to Mr. Kempster; and a youthful novice, just eighteen, called Henry Irving. Making his first appearance, he spoke the first word in the first piece (played for the first time in the town, I believe), on the first, or opening night, of the new theatre, from which he has by his industry and genius worked up to the proud position of the first man in the first theatre of the first city of the world! The words of the speech itself, '*Here's to our enterprise!*' had in them almost a prophetic tone of aspiration and success. So busy was I in front and behind the scenes, that I was barely able to reach my place on the stage in time for the rising of the curtain. I kept my back to the audience till my cue to speak was given, all the while buttoning up, tying, and finishing my dressing generally, so that scant attention would be given to others. But

even under these circumstances I was compelled to notice, and with perfect appreciation, the great and most minute care which had been bestowed by our aspirant on the completion of his costume. In those days managers provided the mere dress. Accessories, or 'properties' as they were called, were found by every actor. Henry Irving was, from his splendid white hat and feathers to the tips of his shoes, a perfect picture; and, no doubt, had borrowed his authority from some historical picture of the Louis XIII. period. The whole season was a great success, but very few of its items can be enumerated, all books of reference, programmes, etc., being long since destroyed. At Christmas we played, 'with furbished arms and new supplies of men,' 'Puss in Boots' for the pantomime."

"The impersonation," as the neophyte related it long afterwards, "was not a success. I was nervous, and suffered from stage fright. My second appearance as Cleomenes in 'A Winter's Tale' was even more disheartening, as in Act V. I entirely forgot my lines, and abruptly quitted the scene, putting out all the other actors. My manager, however, put down my failure to right causes, and instead of dispensing with my services, gave me some strong and practical advice."

All which is dramatic enough, and gives us a glimpse of the good old provincial stage life. That touch of encouragement instead of dismissal is significant of the fair, honest system which then obtained in this useful training school.

CHAPTER II.

1857—1859.

EDINBURGH, AND THE SCOTTISH THEATRES.

AT the Sunderland theatre he remained only four months, and though the manager pressed him to stay with him, the young actor felt that here he had not the opportunities he desired. He accordingly accepted an engagement at the Edinburgh theatre, ~~and~~ which began on February 9, 1857.

Among the faces that are familiar at any "first night" at the Lyceum, are those of Mr. Robert Wyndham and his wife. There is something romantic in the thought that these guests of the London manager and actor in the height of his success and prosperity should have been the early patrons of the unfriended provincial player. Mr. Wyndham was one of the successors of that sagacious Murray to whom the Edinburgh stage owes so much that is respectable. Here our actor remained for two years and a half, enjoying the benefits of that admirable, useful discipline by which alone a knowledge of acting is to be acquired—viz. a varied practice in a vast round

of characters. This experience, though acquired in a hurried and perfunctory fashion, is of enormous value in the way of training. The player is thus introduced to every shade and form of character, and can practise himself in all the methods of expression. Such will prompt or inspire a performer of even indifferent abilities. He is forced, almost in spite of himself, to find proper expression for modes of thought, humours, and the like. When he finds himself in possession of some new part, the old experience will supply him with devices or suggestions. It is only in this way that the actor will acquire the incomparable and invaluable gift of *breadth*, which is the sole and perhaps exclusive property of actors of "the old school." Now that provincial theatres are abolished, and have given place to the "travelling companies," the actor has few opportunities of learning his business, and one result is a "thinness" or meagreness of interpretation. The dramatists, also, lacking this useful training, are therefore as meagre in what they furnish to the players, and the purveyors and those purveyed for thus react upon each other. In this Edinburgh school our actor performed "a round," as it is called, of no less than three hundred and fifty characters! This seems amazing. It is, in truth, an extraordinary list, ranging over every sort of minor character.

He here also enjoyed opportunities of performing with famous "stars" who came round the provinces, Miss Elien Faucit, Mrs. Stirling, Vandenhoff,

Charles Dillon, Madame Celeste, "Ben" Webster, Robson, the facetious Wright, the buoyant Charles Mathews, his life-long friend Toole, of "incompressible humour," and the American, Miss Cushman.¹ This, it is clear, was a period of useful drudgery, but in it he found his account. The company visited various Scotch towns, which the actor has described pleasantly enough in what might seem an extract from one of the old theatrical memoirs. He had always a vein of quiet humour, the more agreeable because it is unpretending and without effort.

¹ Long after, in his prosperity, he recalled to American listeners an excellent piece of advice given him by this actress. He was speaking of the invaluable practice of revealing thoughts in the face before giving them utterance, where, he said, it "will be found that the most natural, the most seemingly accidental effects are obtained when the working of the mind is seen before the tongue gives its words. This lesson was enjoined on me when I was a very young man by that remarkable actress, Charlotte Cushman. I remember that when she played Meg Merrilies I was cast for Henry Bertram, on the principle seemingly that an actor with no singing voice is admirably fitted for a singing part. It was my duty to give Meg Merrilies a piece of money, and I did it after the traditional fashion by handing her a large purse full of coin of the realm, in the shape of broken crockery, which was generally used in financial transactions on the stage, because when the virtuous maiden rejected with scorn the advances of the lordly libertine, and threw his pernicious bribe upon the ground, the clatter of the broken crockery suggested fabulous wealth. But after the play, Miss Cushman, in the course of some kindly advice, said to me, 'Instead of giving me that purse, don't you think it would have been much more natural if you had taken a number of coins from your pocket and given me the smallest? That is the way one gives alms to a beggar, and it would have added greatly to the realism of the scene.' I have never forgotten that lesson."

It would be difficult to give an idea of the prodigious labour which this earnest, resolute young man underwent while struggling to "learn his profession" in the most thorough way. The iron discipline of the theatre favoured his efforts, and its calls on the exertions of the actor seem, now-a-days, truly extraordinary. In another laborious profession, the office of "deviling" for a counsel in full practice, which entails painful, gratuitous drudgery, is welcomed as a privilege by any young man who wishes to rise. A few of these Edinburgh bills are now before me, and present nights of singularly hard work for so young a man. We may wonder, too, at the audience which could have stomach for so lengthy a programme. Thus, one night, January 7, 1858, when the pantomime was running, the performances began with the pantomime of 'Little Bo-Peep,' in which we find our hero as Scruncher, "the Captain of the Wolves." After the pantomime came 'The Middy Ashore,' in which he was Tonnish, "an exquisite," concluding with 'The Wandering Boys,' in which we again find him as Gregoire, "confidential servant to the Countess Croissey." We find him nearly always in three pieces of a night, and he seems, in pieces of a light sort, to have been "cast" for the gentlemanly captain of the "walking" sort; in more serious ones, for the melodramatic and dignified characters. In 'Nicholas Nickleby' he was the hero; and also Jack Wind the boatswain, the chief mutineer, in 'Robinson Crusoe.' Among his fellow-actors at this period we find the name of D. Lyons, one of

the sound performers useful in their way, to whom he afterwards gave engagements at his own theatre; and Mr. E. Saker, later manager of a theatre at Liverpool. In the course of this season Toole and Miss Louisa Keeley came to the theatre, when Irving opened the night as the Marquis de Cevennes in 'Plot and Passion,' next appearing in the "laughable farce" (and it *is* one, albeit old-fashioned), 'The Loan of a Lover,' in which he was Amersfort, and finally playing Leeford, "Brownlow's nephew," in 'Oliver Twist.' One Gommersal, now forgotten, but once famed for his singular likeness to Napoleon, was the leader amongst the low comedians of the company.

The young man, full of hope and resolution, went cheerfully through these labours, though his name, as he himself tells us, "continued to occupy a useful but obscure position in the play-bill, and nothing occurred to suggest to the manager the propriety of doubling my salary, though he took care to assure me I was 'made to rise.'" This salary was the modest one of thirty shillings a week, then the usual one for what was termed "juvenile lead." The old classification, "walking lady," "singing chambermaid," "heavy father," etc., will have soon altogether disappeared, simply because the round of characters that engendered it have disappeared. Now the manager selects, at his good-will and pleasure, anybody, in or out of his company, whom he thinks will best suit the character.

As Mr. Wyndham informs me: "During the short

period he was under our management, both Mrs. Wyndham and myself took a most lively interest in his promotion, for he was always perfect, and any character, however small, he might have been called upon to represent, was in itself a study; and I believe he would have sacrificed a week's salary, a small affair by the way, to exactly look like the character he was about to portray."

Of these old Edinburgh days Irving always thought fondly. At the Scottish capital he is now welcomed with an affectionate sympathy; and the various intellectual societies of the city—Philosophical and others—are ever glad to receive instruction and entertainment from his lips. In November 1891, when he was visiting the Students' Union Dramatic Society, he told them that some thirty years before "he was member of a University there—the old Theatre Royal. There he had studied for two years and a half his beautiful art, and there he learnt the lesson that they would all learn, that—

'Deep the oak must sink its roots in earth obscure,
That hopes to lift its branches to the sky.'

In some of his later speeches "of occasion" he has scattered little autobiographical touches that are not without interest. On one occasion he recalled how he was once summoned over to Dublin to supply the place of another actor at the Queen's Theatre, then under the direction of two "manager-twins," the Brothers Webb. The Queen's was but a small

house, conducted on old-fashioned principles, and had a rather turbulent audience. When the actor made his appearance he was, to his astonishment, greeted with yells, general anger, and disapprobation. This was to be his reception throughout the whole engagement, which was luckily not a long one. He, however, stuck gallantly to his post, and sustained his part with courage. He described the manager as perpetually making "alarums and excursions" in front of the curtain to expostulate with the audience. These "Brothers Webb, who had found their twin-ship profitable in playing the 'Dromios,' were worthy actors enough, and much respected in their profession; they had that marked individuality of character now so rarely found on the boards. Having discovered, at last, what his offence was, viz. the taking the place of a dismissed actor—an unconscious application, in short, of 'land-grabbing'—his placid good-humour gradually made its way, and before the close of the engagement he had, according to the correct theatrical phrase, 'won golden opinions.'"

At the close of the season, in May 1859, the Edinburgh company set out on its travels, visiting various Scotch provincial towns. During this peregrination, when at Dundee, the idea occurred to him and a brother-player of venturing "a reading" in the neighbouring town of Linlithgow. This adventure he has himself told in print. It may be said here that our actor has an agreeable vein of narrative, marked by a quiet, rather placid humour, ~~and~~ which is also

found in his occasional speeches. The charm and secret of this is the absence of all affectation or pretence; a talisman ever certain to win listeners and readers. Taking his friend, who was Mr. Saker, into his confidence, he proceeded to arrange the scheme. But he shall tell the story himself.

“I had been about two years upon the stage, and was fulfilling my first engagement at Edinburgh. Like all young men, I was full of hope. It happened to be vacation time—‘preaching week,’ as it is called in Scotland—and it struck me that I might turn my leisure to account by giving a reading. I imparted this project to another member of the company, who entered into it with enthusiasm. He, too, was young and ambitious. I promised him half the profits.

“Having arranged the financial details, we came to the secondary question—Where was the reading to be given? It would scarcely do in Edinburgh; the public there had too many other matters to think about. Linlithgow was a likely place. My friend accordingly paid several visits to Linlithgow, engaged the town-hall, ordered the posters, and came back every time full of confidence. Meanwhile, I was absorbed in the ‘Lady of Lyons,’ which, being the play that most charmed the fancy of a young actor, I had decided to read; and day after day, perched on Arthur’s Seat, worked myself into a romantic fever. The day came, and we arrived at Linlithgow in high spirits. I felt a thrill of pride at seeing my name for the first time in big capitals on the posters, which

announced that at 'eight o'clock precisely Mr. Henry Irving would read the "Lady of Lyons."' At the hotel we eagerly questioned our waiter as to the probability of there being a great rush. He pondered some time; but we could get no other answer out of him than 'Nane can tell.' 'Did he think there would be fifty people there?' '*Nane can tell.*'

"Eight o'clock drew near, and we sallied out to survey the scene of operations. The crowd had not yet begun to collect in front of the town-hall, and the man who had undertaken to be there with the key was not visible. As it was getting late, we went in search of the doorkeeper. He was quietly reposing in the bosom of his family, and to our remonstrance replied, 'Ou, ay, the reading! I forgot all about it.' This was not inspiring.

"The door was opened, the gas was lighted, and my manager made the most elaborate preparations for taking the money. While he was thus energetically applying himself to business, I was strolling like a casual spectator on the other side of the street, taking some last feverish glances at the play, and anxiously watching for the first symptoms of 'the rush.'

"The time wore on. The town clock struck eight, and still there was no sign of 'the rush.' Half-past eight, and not a soul to be seen—not even a small boy! I could not read the 'Lady of Lyons' to an audience consisting of the manager, with a face as long as two tragedies, so there was nothing for it but to

beat a retreat. No one came out even to witness our discomfiture. Linlithgow could not have taken the trouble to study the posters, which now seemed such horrid mockeries in our eyes.

“ We managed to scrape together enough money to pay the expenses, which operation was a sore trial to my speculative manager, and a pretty severe tax upon the emoluments of the ‘juvenile lead.’ We returned to Edinburgh the same night, and on the journey, by way of showing that I was not at all cast down, I favoured my manager with selections from the play, which he good-humouredly tolerated.

“ This incident was vividly revived last year, as I passed through Linlithgow on my way from Edinburgh to Glasgow, in which cities I gave, in conjunction with my friend Toole, two readings on behalf of the sufferers by the bank failure, which produced a large sum of money. My companion in the Linlithgow expedition was Mr. Edward Saker—now one of the most popular managers in the provinces.”

In March 1859 we find our actor at the old Surrey Theatre, playing under Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Creswick, for a “grand week,” so it was announced, “of Shakespeare, and first-class pieces; supported by Miss Elsworthy and Mr. Creswick, whose immense success during the past week has been *rapturously endorsed* by crowded and enthusiastic audiences.” “Rapturously endorsed” is good. In ‘Macbeth’ we find Irving fitted with the modest part of Siward, and this only for the first three nights of the week. There

was an after-piece, in which he had no part, and 'Money' was given on the other nights.

But he had now determined to quit Edinburgh, lured by the prospect of "a London engagement," an *ignis fatuus* for many an actor, who is too soon to find out that a London engagement does not mean exactly a London success. In 1859 he made his farewell appearance in 'Claude Melnotte,' and was received in very cordial fashion. As he told the people of Glasgow many years later, he ever thought gratefully of the Scotch, as they were the first who gave him encouragement.

This London engagement was offered him by the late Mr. A. Harris, then managing the Princess's Theatre. It was for three years. But when he arrived he found that the only opening given him was a part of a few lines in a play called 'Ivy Hall.' As this meagre employment promised neither improvement nor fame, he went to the manager and begged his release. This he obtained, and courageously quitted London, determined not to return until he could claim a respectable and conspicuous position. Thus we find him, with perhaps a heavy heart, once more returning to the provinces, just as Mrs. Siddons had to return to the same form of drudgery after her failure at Drury Lane. Before leaving London, that wholesome taste for appealing to the appreciation of the judicious and intellectual fashion of the community, which has always been "a note" of his character, prompted him to give two readings at the old palace

of Crosby Hall. In this he was encouraged by his city friends and old companions, who had faith in his powers. It was something to make this exhibition under the roof-tree of that interesting old pile, not yet "restored"; and the *locale*, we may imagine, was in harmony with his own refined tastes. He read the 'Lady of Lyons,' on December 19, 1859, and the somewhat artificial 'Virginius' on February 1, 1860. These performances were received with favour, and were pronounced by the public critics to show scholarly feeling and correct taste. "His conception was good, his delivery clear and effective, and there was a gentlemanly ease and grace in his manners which is exceedingly pleasing to an audience." One observer with some prescience detected "the indefinite something which incontestably and instantaneously shows that the fire of genius is present." Another pronounced "that he was likely to make a name for himself." At the last scenes between the hero and Pauline, the listeners were much affected, and "in some parts of the walls sobs were heard." Another judge opined that "if he attempted a wider sphere of action," he would have a most successful career. This "wider sphere of action" he has since "attempted," but at that moment his eyes were strained, wearily enough, looking for it. It lay before him in the weary round of work in the provinces, to which, as we have seen, he had now to return.

I have before me now a curious little criticism of this performance taken from an old and long-defunct

journal that bore the name of *The Players*, and which will now be read with a curious interest.

“We all know the ‘Dramatic Reading.’ We have all—at least all who have served their apprenticeship to theatrical amusements—suffered the terrible infliction of the Dramatic Reader; but then with equal certainty we have all answered to the next gentleman’s call of a ‘Night with Shakespeare, with Readings, etc.,’ and have again undergone the insufferable bore of hearing our dear old poet murdered by the aspiring genius. Thinking somewhat as we have above written the other evening, we wended our editorial way towards Crosby Hall, where our informant ‘circular’ assured us Mr. Henry Irving was about to read Bulwer’s ‘Lady of Lyons.’ We asked ourselves, Who is Mr. Henry Irving? and memory, rushing to some hidden cave in our mental structure, answered—Henry Irving, oh! yes, to be sure; how stupid! We at once recollected that Mr. Irving was a gentleman of considerable talent, and a great favourite in the provinces. We have often seen his name honourably figuring in the columns of our provincial contemporaries. Now we were most agreeably disappointed on this present occasion; for instead of finding the usual conventional respectable-looking ‘mediocrity,’ we were gratified by hearing the poetical ‘Lady of Lyons’ poetically read by a most accomplished elocutionist, who gave us not only words, but that finer indefinite something which proves incontestably and instantaneously that the fire of genius is present

in the artist. It would be out of place now to speak of the merits of the piece selected by this gentleman, but the merits appeared as striking and the demerits as little so as on any occasion of the kind in our recollection. Claude's picture of his imaginary home was given with such poetic feeling as to elicit a loud burst of approval from his hearers, as also many other passages occurring in the play. The characters were well marked, especially Beauseant and Madame Deschappelles, whilst the little part of Glovis was very pleasingly given. Mr. Irving was frequently interrupted by the applause of his numerous and delighted audience, and at the conclusion was unanimously called to receive their marks of approval."

It was at this interesting performance that Mr. Toole, as he tells us, first met his friend. A very monotonous feature in all dramatic memoirs is found in the record of dates, engagements, and performances, which in many instances are the essence of the whole. They are uninteresting to any one save perhaps to the hero himself. So in this record we shall summarize such details as much as possible. Our actor went straight to Glasgow, to Glover's Theatre, whence he passed to the Theatre Royal, Manchester, where he remained for some four years, till June 1865. Here he found fresh histrionic friends, who "came round" the circuit in succession—such as Edwin Booth, Sothorn, Charles Mathews, G. V. Brooke, Miss Heath, and that versatile actor and dramatist and manager, Dion Boucicault. Here he gradually gained

a position of respect—respect for his unflinching assiduity and scrupulous conscientiousness, qualities which the public is never slow to note. In many points he offers a suggestion of Dickens, in his purpose of doing whatever he attempted in the very best way he could. There are other points, too, in which the actor strongly recalls the novelist; the sympathetic interest in all about him, the absence of affectation combined with great talents, the aptitude for practical business, the knowledge of character, the precious art of making friends, and the being unspoiled by good fortune. Years later he recalled with grateful pleasure the encouragement he had received here. And his language is touching and bespeaks a sympathetic heart.

“I lived here for five years, and wherever I look—to the right or to the left, to the north or the south—I always find some remembrance, some memento of those five years—youthful aspirations, youthful hopes, battles fought, battles won, battles lost, early ambitions, and many things that fill my mind with pleasure and sometimes with pain. But there is one association connected with my life here that probably is unknown to but a few in this room. That is an association with a friend, which had much to do, I believe, with the future course of our two lives. When I tell you that our communions were very grave and very deep, that our friendship was a strong one, and for months and years we fought together, and worked together to the best of our power, and with the means we had then, to give effect to the art we were practising; when I tell

you we dreamt of what might be done, but was not then done, and patted each other on the back and said, 'Well, old fellow, perhaps the day will come when you may have a little more than sixpence in your pocket;' when I tell you that that man was well known to you, and that his name was Calvert, you will understand the nature of my associations with Manchester. Our lives were separated even whilst he lived, and our intercourse ceased altogether; he was working here and I was working elsewhere. I have no doubt that you will be able to trace in my own career, and the success I have had, the benefit of the communion I had with him. When I was in Manchester I had very many friends. I needed good advice at that time, for I found it a very difficult thing as an actor to pursue my profession, and to do justice to certain things that I always had a deep, and perhaps rather an extravagant, idea of, on the sum of £75 a year. I have been making a calculation within the last few minutes of the amount of money that I did earn in those days, and I found that it was about £75 a year. Perhaps one would be acting out of the fifty-two weeks of the year some thirty-five. The other part of the year one would probably be receiving nothing. Then an actor would be tempted perhaps to take a benefit, by which he generally lost £20 or £30. Any friends of mine present who may have thought a little less of me at that time perhaps because of my continuous state of impecuniosity will forgive me when I confess the amount of my earnings. However, that

time is past, but if there are any odd half-crowns that I owe I shall be glad to pay them. I have a very fond recollection, I have an affection for your city, for very many reasons. The training I received here, which Professor Ward has alluded to, was a severe training ; I must say at first it was very severe. I found it a difficult thing to make my way at all with the audience ; and I believe the audience to a certain extent was right ; I think there was no reason that I should make my way with them. I don't think I had learnt enough ; I think I was too raw, too unacceptable. But I am very proud to say that it was not long before, with the firmness of the Manchester friendship which I have always found, they got to like me ; and I think before I parted with them they had an affection for me. At all events, I remember when in this city as little less—or little more—than a walking gentleman, I essayed the part of Hamlet the Dane, I was looked upon as a sort of madman who ought to be taken to some asylum and shut up ; but I found in acting it before the audience that their opinion was a very different one, and before the play was half gone through I was received with a fervour and a kindness which gave me hope and expectation that in the far and distant future I might perhaps be able to benefit by their kindness. If they had not treated me so, if they had chilled me, probably they would have done so little knowing how, sometimes, such a reception may change the life and the career of an artist. Perhaps they thought that by encouraging me they might help me on in the future. I believe

they thought that, I believe that was in the thoughts of many of the audience, for they received me with an enthusiasm and kindness which my merits did not deserve."

The man that could trace these faithful records of provincial stage life, and speak in this natural heartfelt fashion of memories which many would perhaps not wish to revive, must have a genuine sympathetic nature.

Many years later, in his prosperity, he came to Bolton to lay the first stone of a new theatre, on which occasion other old memories recurred to him. "I once played here," he said, "for a week, I am afraid to say how many years ago, and a very good time we had with a little sharing company from Manchester, headed by an actor, Charles Calvert. The piece we acted was called 'Playing with Fire'; and though we did not play with too much money, we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. I always look back to that week with very great pleasure. The theatre then had not certainly every modern appliance, but what the theatre lacked the audience made up for, and a more spontaneous, good-natured public I never played to."

On another occasion he again indulged in a retrospect; indeed, his eyes seem always to have fondly turned back to Manchester and these early days of struggle: "I came all the way from Greenock with a few shillings in my pocket and found myself in the splendid theatre now presided over by our friend Captain Bainbridge. The autumn dramatic season of

1860 commenced with a little farce, and a little two-act piece from the French, called 'The Spy,' the whole concluding with 'God Save the Queen,' in which, and in the little two-act piece from the French, I took prominent part; so you see, gentlemen, that as a vocalist I even then had some proficiency, although I had not achieved the distinction subsequently attained by my efforts in Mephistopheles. Well, you will admit that the little piece from the French and the one-act farce—'God Save the Queen' was left out after the first night, through no fault of mine I assure you—you will admit that these two pieces did not make up a very sensational bill of fare. I cannot conscientiously say that they crammed the theatre for a fortnight, but what did that matter?—we were at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, the manager was a man of substance, and we were all very happy and comfortable. By playing as much music as possible between the acts, we managed to eke out the performance until half-past nine, when we could get to bed early if we chose, for Manchester people, we were told, were early people. The next bill of fare at the Theatre Royal was 'Faust and Marguerite,' which had been produced very successfully a season or two before. This was Charles Kean's version of a French melodrama, from which Gounod took his libretto of 'Faust.' It was in three acts and had four scenes, and I remember, as Dr. Faust, being transported at the end of the play to the bottom of a well amidst sulphurous and tormenting flames. Besides 'Faust and Marguerite,' there

was a burlesque of Byron's, 'The Maid and the Magpie,' in which I also played, the part being that of an exceedingly heavy father ; and you will forgive me, I am sure, for saying that the very heavy father was considered by some to be anything but a dull performance. But though the houses were poor, we were a merry family. Our wants were few : we were not extravagant. We had a good deal of exercise, and what we did not earn we worked hard to borrow as frequently as possible from one another. Ah ! they were very happy days. But do not think that this was our practice always of an afternoon ; there was plenty of fine work done in the theatre. The public of Manchester was in those days a critical public, and could not long be satisfied with such meagre fare as I have pictured. During the five years of my sojourn in Manchester there was a succession of brilliant plays performed by first-rate actors, and I must say that I owe much to the valuable experience which I gained in your Theatre Royal under the management of John Knowles."

In his Manchester recollections, as we see, there are hints of very serious struggles and privations. They are, as says Boswell, "bark and steel for the mind." A man is the better for them, though the process is painful. They assuredly teach resource and patience ; years after the actor, now grown celebrated and prosperous, used to relate, and relate dramatically, this very touching little story of his struggles :—

"Perhaps the most remarkable Christmas dinner at which I have ever been present was the one at which

we dined upon underclothing. Do you remember Joe Robins—a nice genial fellow who played small parts in the provinces? Ah, no; that was before your time. Joe Robins was once in the gentleman's furnishing business in London city. I think he had a wholesale trade, and was doing well. However, he belonged to one of the semi-Bohemian clubs; associated a great deal with actors and journalists, and when an amateur performance was organized for some charitable object, he was cast for the clown in a burlesque called 'Guy Fawkes.'

“Perhaps he played the part capitally; perhaps his friends were making game of him when they loaded him with praises; perhaps the papers for which his Bohemian associates wrote went rather too far when they asserted that he was the artistic descendant and successor of Grimaldi. At any rate Joe believed all that was said to him and written about him, and when some wit discovered that Grimaldi's name was also Joe, the fate of Joe Robins was sealed. He determined to go upon the stage professionally and become a great actor. Fortunately Joe was able to dispose of his stock and good-will for a few hundreds, which he invested so as to give him an income sufficient to prevent the wolf from getting inside his door in case he did not eclipse Garrick, Kean, and Kemble. He also packed up for himself a liberal supply of his wares, and started in his profession with enough shirts, collars, handkerchiefs, stockings, and underclothing to equip him for several years.

“The amateur success of poor Joe was never repeated on the regular stage. He did not make an absolute failure; no manager would entrust him with parts big enough for him to fail in. But he drifted down to general utility, and then out of London, and when I met him he was engaged in a very small way, on a very small salary, at a Manchester theatre.

“His income-eked out his salary; but Joe was a generous, great-hearted fellow, who liked everybody, and whom everybody liked, and when he had money, he was always glad to spend it upon a friend or give it away to somebody more needy. So, piece by piece, as necessity demanded, his princely supply of haberdashery had diminished, and now only a few shirts and underclothes remained to him.

“Christmas came in very bitter weather. Joe had a part in the Christmas pantomime. He dressed with other poor actors, and he saw how thinly some of them were clad when they stripped before him to put on their stage costumes. For one poor fellow in especial his heart ached. In the depth of a very cold winter he was shivering in a suit of very light summer underclothing, and whenever Joe looked at him, the warm flannel under-garments snugly packed away in an extra trunk weighed heavily on his mind. Joe thought the matter over, and determined to give the actors who dressed with him a Christmas dinner. It was literally a dinner upon underclothing, for most of the shirts and drawers which Joe had cherished so long went to the pawnbroker's or the slop-shop to provide the money

for the meal. The guests assembled promptly, for nobody else is ever so hungry as a hungry actor. The dinner was to be served at Joe's lodgings, and before it was placed on the table Joe beckoned his friend with the gauze underclothing into a bedroom, and pointing to a chair, silently withdrew. On that chair hung a suit of underwear, which had been Joe's pride. It was of a comfortable scarlet colour; it was thick, warm, and heavy; it fitted the poor actor as if it had been manufactured especially to his measure. He put it on, and as the flaming flannels encased his limbs, he felt his heart glowing within him with gratitude to dear Joe Robins.

"That actor never knew—or, if he knew, could never remember—what he had for dinner on that Christmas afternoon. He revelled in the luxury of warm garments. The roast beef was nothing to him in comparison with the comfort of his under-vest; he appreciated the drawers more than the plum-pudding. Proud, happy, warm, and comfortable, he felt little inclination to eat; but sat quietly, and thanked Providence and Joe Robins with all his heart.

"'You seem to enter into that poor actor's feelings very sympathetically.'

"'I have good reason to do so,' replied Mr. Irving, with his sunshiny smile, '*for I was that poor actor!*'"

This really affecting, most simple incident he himself related when on his first visit to America.

On the eve of his departure from Manchester he determined on an ambitious attempt and played

'Hamlet' for his own benefit. The company good-naturedly favoured his project, though they fancied it was beyond his strength. It was, as he has told us, an extraordinary success, and the performance was called for on several nights—a high compliment, as it was considered, in the city where the custom was to require a "new bill" every night. He himself did not put much faith in the prophecies of future eminence that were uttered on this occasion; he felt that after all there was no likelihood of his emerging from the depressing monotonous round of provincial histrionics. But rescue was nearer at hand than he fancied. The stage is stored with surprises, and there at least it is the unexpected that always, or usually, happens.

Most actors have a partiality for what may be called fantastic freaks or "practical jokes," to be accounted for perhaps by a sort of reaction from their own rather monotonous calling. The late Mr. Sothern delighted in such pastimes, and Mr. Toole is not exactly indifferent to them. The excitement caused by that ingenious pair of mountebanks, the Davenport Brothers, will still be recalled: their appearance at Manchester early in 1865 prompted our actor to a lively method of exposure, which he carried out with much originality. With the aid of another actor, Mr. Philip Day, and a prestidigitator, Mr. Frederic Maccabe, he arranged his scheme, and invited a large number of friends and notables of the city to a performance in the Athenæum. Assuming the dress characteristics of a patron of the Brothers, one Dr. Ferguson, Irving came forward and

delivered a grotesque address, and then, in the usual familiar style, proceeded to "tie up" his coadjutors in the cabinet, with the accompaniments of ringing bells, beating tambourines, etc. The whole was, as a matter of course, successful. It was not, however, strictly within the programme of an actor who was "toiling at his oar," but the vivacity of a youth was likely enough to have prompted it.

Leaving Manchester, he passed to Edinburgh, Bury, Oxford, and even to Douglas, Isle of Man, where the assembly-room used to be fitted up to do duty as a theatre. Within six months, from January to July 1866, he was at Liverpool with Mr. Alexander Henderson.

Thus had he seen many men and many theatres and many audiences, and must have learned many a rude lesson, besides learning his profession. At this moment, as he described it long after, he found himself one day standing on the steps of the theatre looking hopelessly down the street, and in a sort of despair, without an engagement, and no very likely prospect of engagement, not knowing indeed which way to turn, unless some "stroke of luck" came. But the "actor's luck," as he said, "is really *work*;" and the lucky actor is above all a worker. At this hopeless moment arrived unexpectedly a proposal from Boucicault that he should join him at Manchester, and take a leading character in his new piece. He accepted; but with some shrewdness stipulated that should he succeed to the author's satisfaction, he was to obtain an engage-

ment in London. This was acceded to, and with a light heart he set off.

Mr. Boucicault, indeed, long after in America boasted that it was his good fortune to "discover Irving" in 1866, when he was playing in "the country." The performance took place on July 30, 1866. "He was cast for a part in 'Hunted Down,' and played it so admirably that I invited my friend, Mr. Charles Reade, to go and see him. He confirmed my opinion so strongly, that when 'Hunted Down' was played in London a few months afterwards, I gave it conditionally on Mr. Irving's engagement. That was his *début* in London as a leading actor." He added some judicious criticism, distinguishing Irving as "an eccentric serious actor" from Jeffeson, who was "an eccentric comic actor." "His mannerisms are so very marked that an audience requires a long familiarity with his style before they can appreciate many merits that are undeniable. It is unquestionable that he is the greatest actor as a tragedian that London has seen during the last fifty years."¹

¹ So uncertain and delusive are all theatrical events and their history, that it is not surprising that yet another should have been found to claim the credit of launching Henry Irving on his course. Mr. Wybert Reeve declares that "on a date not given, but evidently in the 'sixties,' he walked with Miss Herbert on Ryde Pier; still wanting me to play at St. James's, and open in Doricourt; gave me two more days to think about it." And then, two days later: "A long talk again with Miss Herbert. As I have two theatres on my hands and a company, decided not to go. She seemed very disappointed; asked me what she should do. Thought of Henry Irving, who followed me in Manchester; advised her to write to Mr.

In this piece, 'Mary Leigh and her Three Lives' (which later became 'Hunted Down'), the heroine was performed by Miss Kate Terry, at that time the only member of a gifted family who had made a reputation. Irving's character was Rawdon Scudamore, a polished villain, to which he imparted such force and *finesse* that it impressed all who witnessed it with the belief that here was an actor of striking power. It at once gave him "a position," and an impression of his gifts became of a sudden left upon the profession, upon those even who had not seen him. No less than three offers of engagement were made to him. The author of the piece, as we have seen, was particularly struck with his powers; his London engagement was now secure, and he was to receive a tempting offer, through Mr. Tom Taylor, from the management of the St. James's Theatre, about to open with the new season.

Chambers; promised to do so as well, if engaged for Mr. Knowles to release him. Wrote to Chambers about Irving." All which, as I know from the best authority, is purely imaginative. The engagement was entirely owing to Boucicault.

CHAPTER III.

1866.

THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE—'HUNTED DOWN'—THE NEW
VAUDEVILLE THEATRE—'THE TWO ROSES.'

THE directress of the new venture at the St. James's Theatre was Miss Herbert, a graceful, sympathetic person of much beauty, with exquisite golden hair and almost devotional features, which had supplied many of the Pre-Raphaelite brethren with angelic faces for their canvases. On the stage her efforts were directed by great intelligence and spirit, and she was now about to essay all the fearful difficulties and perplexities of management. Like so many, she had before her a very high ideal of her office: the good, vivacious old comedies, with refined, correct acting, were to entice the wayward public; but this ambitious, praiseworthy spirit has too often to content itself with a barren success of esteem, with pieces by Reade, Tom Taylor, and Boucicault. This pleasing actress was destined to have a chequered course of struggle and adventure, a mingled yarn of success and disappointment, and has long since retired from the stage.

At the St. James's Theatre the company was formed

of the manageress herself; of Mr. Walter Lacy, an actor of fine polish and grace; of Addison, one of the old school; with that excellent mirth-making pair, the Frank Mathews'. The stage-manager was Irving. Here, then, he found himself, to his inexpressible satisfaction, in a respected and respectable position, one very different from that of the actor-of-all-work in the provinces. Not the least comforting reflection was that he had won his way to this station by remarkable talent and conscientious labour. The theatre opened on October 6, 1866. 'Hunted Down' was the piece originally fixed upon, but it could not be got ready in time, so a change was made to the lively old comedy of the 'Belle's Stratagem,' the name which it had been originally proposed to give to Oliver Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer.'

The actor tells us of this interesting occasion: "I was cast for Doricourt, a part which I had never played before, and which I thought did not suit me; I felt that this was the opinion of the audience soon after the play began. The house appeared to be indifferent, and I believed that failure was conclusively stamped upon my work, when suddenly, upon my exit after the mad scene, I was startled by a burst of applause, and so great was the enthusiasm of the audience, that I was compelled to reappear upon the scene, a somewhat unusual thing except upon the operatic stage."¹ This compliment is nearly always

¹ Related in one of his conversations with Mr. Joseph Hatton. I have heard Mr. Walter Lacy describe the modest, grateful fashion in

paid to our actor when he performs this part. It is easy, of course, to look grave and depreciate such unsuitableness to the propriety of the dramatic action; but it is the audience that "gives the drama laws," and every stage-manager knows by awkward experience that such expression is not to be resisted save at the expense of a serious tumult.

In the criticisms of the piece the efforts of the interesting manageress-actress of course received the chief attention. Dramatic criticism, however, at this time, was of a somewhat meagre kind, and the elaborate study of an individual performer's merits was not then in fashion. The play itself was then "the thing," and accordingly we find the new actor's exertions dealt with in a curt but encouraging style: "Mr. H. Irving was the fine gentleman in Doricourt; but he was more, for his mad scenes were truthfully conceived and most subtly executed." Thus the *Athenæum*. And Mr. Oxenford, with his usual reserve, after pronouncing that the comedy was "a compound of English dullness and Italian pantomime," added that Doricourt "was heavy company till he feigns madness, and the mock insanity represented by Mr. H. Irving is the cause of considerable mirth." This slight and meagre tribute contrasts oddly with the elaborate fullness of stage criticism in our day.

The piece has always continued in the actor's *répertoire*, after being compressed into a few scenes,

which our actor received some hints given him by this old experienced performer at rehearsal as to the playing of his part.

viz. six. The rich, old-fashioned dress and powder suits the performer and sets off his intelligent features, which wear a smiling expression as though consciously enjoying the comedy flavour of the piece. There is a graceful dance of antique grace and pedantry, which is highly relished.

A little later, on November 5, 'Hunted Down' was brought forward, in which the actor, as Rawdon Scudamore, made a deep impression. It was declared that the part "completely served the purpose of displaying the talent of Mr. Henry Irving, whose ability in depicting the most vindictive feelings, *merely by dint of facial expression*, is very remarkable." Facial expression is, unhappily, but little used on our English stage, and yet it is one of the most potent agencies—more so than speech or gesture.¹ It was admitted, too, that he displayed another precious gift—reserve—conveying even more than he expressed: a store of secret villainy as yet unrevealed. Many were the compliments paid him on this creation; and friends of Charles Dickens know how much struck he was with the new actor's impersonation. The novelist was always eager to recognize new talent of this kind. Some years later, "Charles Dickens the younger," as he was then called, related at a banquet how his celebrated father had once gone to see the 'Lancashire Lass,' and on his return home had said: "But

¹ I may be allowed to refer those who would learn the importance of this agent to my little treatise, *The Art of Acting*, where it is fully discussed.

there was a young fellow in the play who sits at the table and is bullied by Sam Emery; his name is Henry Irving, and if that young man does not one day come out as a great actor, I know nothing of art." A worthy descendant of the Kembles, Mrs. Sartoris, also heartily appreciated his powers.¹ During

¹ Of this night, my friend Mr. Arthur A' Beckett has recently recalled some memories: "All the dramatic critics were assembled. John Oxenford—kindest of men and ripest of scholars—for the *Times*, E. L. Blanchard for the *Daily Telegraph*, John Hollingshead (still amongst us) the predecessor of my good friend Moy Thomas of the *Daily News*, Leicester Buckingham for the *Morning Star*, Desmond Ryan (I think) for the *Standard*, Heraud for the *Illustrated London News*, Tomlins or Richard Lee for the *Advertiser*, and Joseph Knight (again one of our veterans) for the *Sunday Times*. There were others—Clement Scott, W. S. Gilbert, Andrew Halliday, Tom Robertson, Harry Leigh, Jeff Prowse, Tom Hood—all members of the Savage Club in the days before clay pipes went out of fashion. We were assembled to see a new piece by Dion Boucicault, then one of the most prolific of dramatists. He had disappeared to America, and had returned some ten years later with the 'Colleen Bawn,' to make the fortunes of the Adelphi and teach dramatists the real value of their work. Until Boucicault introduced percentages on the gross receipts, playwrights were satisfied with £100 an act. That was the usual sum, and was accepted by such accomplished authors as Tom Taylor, Mark Lemon, Shirley Brooks, and Maddison Morton. But Boucicault changed all that, and the modern dramatists are deriving the benefit of the system he successfully introduced. Well, we were waiting for the curtain to draw up on the first act of the new play. It was called 'Hunted Down,' and it was buzzed in the stalls that Dion had picked up a very clever young actor in the provinces, who, after a short career in town, had made his mark in Manchester. He was called—Henry Irving. Then there was another comparatively new name on the bills—Ada Dyas. The piece had a strong plot, and was fairly successful; but, assisted by the title, I believe it was a fight against long odds. A repentant woman 'with a past' was hunted down. I fancy Miss Herbert (one of the

the season a round of pieces were brought forward, such as 'The Road to Ruin,' 'The School for Scandal' (in which he played young Dornton and Joseph Surface), 'Robert Macaire,' and a new Robertson drama, 'A Rapid Thaw,' in which he took the part of a conventional Irishman, O'Hoolagan! It must have been a quaint surprise to see our actor in a Hibernian character. After the season closed, the company went "on tour" to Liverpool, Dublin, and other towns.¹

Miss Herbert's venture, like so many other ventures planned on an intellectual basis, did not flourish exceedingly; and in the course of the years that

most charming actresses that ever trod the boards) was the 'woman with the past,' and that it was she who was 'hunted down.' But, although my impressions of the play are vague and blurred, I can see Henry Irving as the most admirable villain—cool, calm, and implacable—and Ada Dyas as his suffering wife. They stand before me as I write, two distinct figures. Of the rest of the piece, I repeat, I remember next to nothing."

¹ At this time I happened to be living in Dublin, and recall with pleasure the comedian's striking face and figure, and the entertainment that he imparted. Once buying a newspaper in a shop that was close by the fine old Theatre Royal, since destroyed by fire, a "characteristical" pair entered, whom I recognized from having seen them on the stage. I was particularly struck with the pale, well-marked features, the black flowing hair, the dress of correct black, the whole very much suggesting Nicholas Nickleby, or some other of Dickens' "walking gentlemen." There was something strangely attractive about him, and a courteous, kindly tone to the owner of the shop as he made his purchase. When the pair had departed the lady's tongue "grew wanton in his praise." "Oh, but Mr. Irving," she said, enthusiastically, "he is the *one*; a perfect gentleman! Every morning he comes in to buy his newspaper, and he do speak so *nice*ly. I *do* think he is a charming young man," etc.

followed we find our actor appearing rather fitfully at the various London theatres, which at this time, before the great revival of the stage, were in rather an unsettled state. He went with Sothorn to play in Paris, appearing at the Theatre des Italiens, and in December 1867 found an engagement at the Queen's Theatre in Long Acre, a sort of "converted" concert-room, but where nothing seemed to thrive; and here for the first time he played with Miss Ellen Terry, in 'Catherine and Petruchio' (a piece it might be well worth while to revive at the Lyceum); and in that very effective drama, 'Dearer than Life,' with Brough and Toole; in 'The School for Scandal': also making a striking effect in 'Bill Sikes.' I fancy this character, though somewhat discounted by Dubosc, would, if revived, add to his reputation. We find him also performing the lugubrious Falkland in 'The Rivals.' He also performed Redburn in the highly popular 'Lancashire Lass,' which "ran" for many months. At the Queen's Theatre he remained for over a year, playing various characters, but not making any marked advance in his profession, owing to the lack of favourable opportunities. He had a part in Watts Philips' drama of 'Not Guilty.' Then, in 1869, he came to the Haymarket, and had an engagement at Drury Lane in Boucicault's 'Formosa,' a piece that gave rise to much excited discussion on the ground of the "moralities." His part was, however, colourless, being little more than a cardboard figure: anything fuller or rounder would have been lost on so huge a

stage. It was performed, or "ran," for over a hundred nights. With his sensitive, impressionable nature the performance of so barren a character must have been positive pain: his dramatic soul lay blank and fallow during the whole of that unhappy time.

These efforts were but of a fitful and precarious kind. Not very much ground had been gained beyond the reputation of a sound and useful performer. Relying on my own personal impressions—for I followed him from the beginning of his course—I should say that the first distinct effort that left prominent and distinct impression was his performance at the Gaiety Theatre, in December 1869, of the cold, pompous Mr. Chenevix, in Byron's 'Uncle Dick's Darling.' It was felt at once, as I then felt it, that here was a rich original creation, a figure that lingered in the memory, and which you followed, as it moved, with interest and pleasure. There was a surprising finish and reserve. It was agreed that we had now an actor of *genre*, who had the power of creating a character. The impression made was really remarkable, and this specimen of good, pure comedy was set off by the pathetic acting of his friend Toole, who played 'Uncle Dick.' This was a turning-point in his career, and no doubt led to a real important advance. I can recall my own experience of the curious pleasure and satisfaction left by the performance of this unfamiliar actor, who suggested so much more than the rather meagre character itself conveyed. I found myself drawn to see it several times, and still the feeling was always that of some secret

undeveloped power in the clever yet unpretending performer.

About this time an attractive actor, who had been much followed on account of his good looks, one Montague, had joined in management with two diverting drolls—as they were then—James and Thorne, who were the pillars of burlesque at the Strand Theatre. All three felt a sort of inspiration that they were capable of something higher and more “legitimate”—an impression which the event has more than justified. The two last have since, by assiduous study and better opportunities, become truly admirable comedians. A sort of club that had not prospered was lying unused in the Strand, and a little alteration converted it into a theatre. The three managers were anxiously looking for a comedy of modern manners which would exhibit to advantage their several gifts. A young fellow, who had left his desk for playwriting, or attempts, had brought them a sort of comedy which was in a very crude state, but which, it seemed likely, could be made what they wanted; and by the aid of their experience and suggestions, it was fashioned into shape. Indeed, it proved that never was a piece more admirably suited to the company that played it. The characters fitted them all, as it is called, “like gloves.” They were bright, interesting, natural, and humorous; the story was pleasing and interesting, and the dialogue agreeable and smart. Such was ‘The Two Roses,’ which still holds the stage, though it now seems a little old-fashioned. Irving was one of

the performers, and was perhaps the best suited of the group. Thus the whole company, young and spirited, was working on new and rather unhackneyed lines. The perfect success of the piece proved how advantageous is the old system of having a piece "written in the theatre," when the intelligence of performers and of the managers are brought in aid of each other. The little house opened on April 16, 1870, with a piece of Mr. Halliday's; and it was not until a few weeks later that 'The Two Roses' was brought forward, on June 4. The success was instantaneous.

The unctuous Honey, in his own line an excellent original actor, and raised in the good old school of the "low comedian," which has now disappeared, was the good-natured Bagman—a part later taken by James, who was also excellent. Thorne was efficient, and sufficiently reserved in the rather unmeaning blind Caleb Decie; while Montague was the gallant and interesting hero, Jack Wyatt. The two girls were represented in pleasing fashion by Miss Amy Fawsitt and Miss Newton. The piece, as I have said, owed much to the actors, though these again owed much to the piece. It is difficult to adjust the balance of obligation in such cases; but though the best written play is little without good actors, still it is more independent of good acting than good acting is of the play. Good actors can make nothing of a bad play, whereas a good play may make good actors. Miss Amy Fawsitt's was really an agreeable and charm-

ing heroine, though it was amusing to see how she copied Miss Marie Wilton in certain devices, such as the delivery of a naïve utterance, followed by an abrupt and irrepressible laugh of an amiably scoffing kind. But Irving, as Digby Grant, was the chief attraction, and his extraordinary finished and varied playing of that insincere and selfish being excited general admiration.

It has not been noticed, in these days of appropriation, that the piece was practically an ingenious variation, or adaptation, of Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. For here we find old Dorrit, his two daughters, and one of their admirers; also the constant loans, the sudden good fortune, and the equally sudden reverse. It was easy to see that the piece had been formed by the evolution of this one character, the legitimate method, it has always seemed to me, of making a play; whereas the average dramatist adopts a reverse practice of finding a story and then finding characters for it. In fact, a character itself *is* a story.¹

¹ The character Digby Grant is one of interest for Irving, as it was the first that gave him firm hold of public favour. It belongs to pure comedy—a fidgety, selfish being, self-deluded by the practice of social hypocrisies, querulous, scheming, wheedling. It is curious that a very good actor, who later filled the part, took the villainy *au sérieux*, giving the complaint, “*You annoy me very much!*” repeated so often, as a genuine reproach, and with anger. Irving’s was the true view—a simulated vexation, “*You annoy me very much!*” The audience sees that he is *not* “annoyed very much,” that it is a sort of fretful reproof to give himself importance, secure attention, and save himself from being inconvenienced by the mention of disagreeable topics.

The play, however, contains some episodes that are forced and unnatural, such as the dialogue between the lovers over the goldfish, meant to be epigrammatic, and of the Robertsonian or "milk-jug" pattern. And the speech of Digby Grant on the chair is decidedly inappropriate and farcical.¹ After our actor's visit to America, his performance was noticed to be more elaborate and laboured, and had lost some of its spontaneousness—a result which, it has been noted, is too often the result of playing to American audiences, who are pleased with broad effects.

This piece continued to be played for about a year, then thought to be a prodigious run, though it is now found common enough, during which time Irving's reputation steadily increased.²

¹ Some touchings in this highly-finished performance of Irving's I can supply from a few notes made during the earlier performances of the piece. "Witness the effect given to the simple act of uncorking a bottle of sherry, preceded by an oddly significant 'Hem,' which seemed to proclaim his new dignity and pompous feeling of self-assertion with the purpose of 'putting down' the persons he disliked. Another subtle stroke was, on his being invited by the solicitor to prepare himself by a glass of wine for an important communication, his exhibiting a sort of dull wonder. There was a kind of half alacrity commingled with doubt, and at the same time a satisfied complacency in the act. As the play went on his hold over the audience seemed to increase. Really fine in its meaning was the defensive insolence and bluster displayed to his daughter's admirer, his roughness to his 'own child,' his pettish and querulous 'How dare you? How dare you?' The incidents, too, connected with his gout lent a grotesqueness that was diverting; together with the piteous irritation as to the missing corkscrew, his figure being full of strange twitches and jerks and angles."

² The good-looking Montague, following the invariable development, seceded from the management and set up a theatre for

Among those who had taken every note of his efforts was a "long-headed" American manager, whose loudly-expressed criticism was that "he ought to play Richelieu!" This was a far-seeing view. Many years before he had been carrying round the country his two "prodigy" daughters, who had attracted astonishment by their precocious playing in a pretty little piece of courtship, called 'The Young Couple.' The elder later won favour by her powerful and intense acting in 'Leah'; and he was now about taking a theatre with a view of bringing forward his second daughter, Isabel. It seems curious now to think that the handsome, elegantly-designed Lyceum Theatre, built by an accomplished architect on the most approved principles, was then lying derelict, as it were, and at the service of any stray *entrepreneur*. It could be had on very cheap terms, for at this time the revival of theatrical interest had not yet come; the theatre, not yet in high fashion, was conducted on rude, coarse lines. The attractions of the old correct comedy, as seen at the Haymarket, were waning, and the old companies were beginning to break up. Buckstone and Webster were in their decay, yet still ingloriously lagging on the stage. The pit and galleries were catered for. Theatres were constantly opening and as constantly closing. Burlesque of the Gaiety pattern was coming into favour. In this

himself. This not proving successful, he went to America, where he died early.

state of things the shrewd American saw an opportunity. He had an excellent coadjutor in his wife, a clever, hard-working lady, with characteristics that often suggested the good-natured Mrs. Crummies, but without any of the eccentricities of that personage. Her husband took the Lyceum, and proceeded to form a company; and one of his first steps was to offer an engagement to Irving.

The new venture started on September 11, 1871, with an unimportant piece, 'Fanchette,' founded on George Sand's 'Petite Fadette,' in which our actor had a character quite unsuited to his gifts, a sort of peasant lover.¹ It was intended to introduce the manager's daughter, Isabel, in a fantastical part, but the piece was found "too French," and rather far-fetched. The young actor, of course, had to bear his share in the failure; but he could not have dreamt at that moment that here he was to find his regular home, and that for twenty long years he was destined never to be away from the shadow of the great portico of the Lyceum.

¹ It has been stated, I know not with what truth, that he was engaged at a salary of £15 a week, raised on the success of 'The Bells' to £35.

CHAPTER IV.

1871.

'THE BELLS'—WILLS'S 'CHARLES I.'

ON this failure the prospect for the American manager was not very encouraging. He had made a serious mistake at starting. In a few weeks he had replaced it by a version of *Pickwick*, with a view of utilizing his chief comedian's talent as Jingle. The play was but a rude piece of carpentry, without any of the flavour of the novel, hastily put together and acted indifferently; the actors were dressed after the pictures in the story, but did not catch the spirit of their characters. Irving in face and figure and dress was thoroughly Pickwickian, and reproduced Seymour and Browne's sketch very happily, catching the recklessness and rattle of the original. Still, it was difficult to avoid the suggestion of 'Jeremy Diddler,' or of the hero of 'A Race for a Dinner.' The reason perhaps was that the adaptation was conceived in a purely farcical spirit.¹ It has always seemed to me

¹ Mr. F. Kitton has made an admirable and spirited drawing of the actor in this character.

that "the Immortal Pickwick" should be treated as comedy rather than farce, and would be more effective on the stage were the Jingle scenes set forth with due seriousness and sincerity. The incidents at the Rochester Ball, for instance, belong to pure comedy, and would be highly effective. But, as is the case with Dickens' earlier stories, half-a-dozen pieces could be made out of *Pickwick*; since, with all its aberrations and wandering episodes, there is a central framework, or skeleton, which is of the essence, and which a highly-skilled workman might successfully articulate. Some years later Irving put the work into the not very skilful hands of Albery, who reduced it to the proportions of a farce with some pathetic elements. It was called 'Jingle.'

At this time there was "hanging loose on" the theatres, as Dr. Johnson once phrased it, one Leopold Lewis, who had been seduced from an office by the enchantments of the stage. He had made a translation of a very striking French play, 'Le Juif Polonais,' which had been shown to the new actor. This, as is well known, is by the gifted pair, Erckmann-Chatrian, whose realistic but picturesque stories, that call up before us the old "Elsass" life, show extraordinary dramatic power. This 'Juif Polonais' is more a succession of tableaux than a formal play, but, like 'L'Ami Fritz' of the same writers, it has a charm that is irresistible.

It is forgotten that a version of this piece had already been brought before the public at one of the

minor theatres, which was the work of Mr. F. C. Burnand, at that time a busy caterer for the theatres, chiefly of melodramas, such as the 'Turn of the Tide,' and 'Deadman's Point.' This adaptation, however, was of a gruesome pattern, and highly spiced to suit the taste of the audiences.

Irving now felt that he had found here a character and situations of such power and originality as were certain to call out gifts of his own, and whose existence perhaps no one then suspected. The more prosaic manager, fashioned in the old formal school, could see only extravagance in the piece. How deliberate and far-seeing our actor has been in every step of his progress is shown by what he told his friend Hatton of this important engagement:—

“ Much against the wish of my friends, I took an engagement at the Lyceum, then under the management of Mr. Bateman. I had successfully acted in many plays besides 'The Two Roses,' which ran three hundred nights. It was thought by everybody interested in such matters that I ought to identify myself with what they called 'character parts'; though what that phrase means, by the way, I never could exactly understand, for I have a prejudice in the belief that every part should be a character. I always wanted to play in the higher drama. Even in my boyhood my desire had been in that direction. When at the Vaudeville Theatre, I recited the poem of *Eugene Aram*, simply to get an idea as to whether I could impress an audience with a tragic theme. I

hoped I could, and at once made up my mind to prepare myself to play characters of another type. When Mr. Bateman engaged me, he told me he would give me an opportunity, if he could, to play various parts, as it was to his interest as much as to mine to discover what he thought would be successful—though, of course, never dreaming of 'Hamlet' or of 'Richard III.' Well, the Lyceum opened, but did not succeed. Mr. Bateman had lost a lot of money, and he intended giving it up. He proposed to me to go to America with him. By my advice, and against his wish, 'The Bells' was rehearsed, but he did not believe in it much. When he persuaded the manager to produce 'The Bells,' he was told there was a prejudice against that sort of romantic play. It produced a very poor house, although a most enthusiastic one. From that time the theatre prospered."

Our actor, always thus earnest and persuasive, pressed him eagerly, and at last extorted consent¹—and the play, which required scarcely any mounting, was performed on November 25, 1871.

The story was novel, and likely to excite the profoundest interest. Some notes made about the time on his performance in this character may call up the striking impression left by the actor. Upon these contemporaneous criticisms of my own I shall chiefly

¹ At that time I was living in the south of France, in a remote and solitary place, and I recollect the surprise and curiosity with which I heard and read of the extraordinary piece that had been produced, and of the more extraordinary triumph of the new actor. Every one, according to the well-worn phrase, seemed to be "electrified."

draw in this work, as they will be more in harmony with the rest, and supply a homogeneousness.¹

“ It was in this piece that our actor first displayed that picturesqueness of bearing, that outward presentment of the character unattended by exertion or ‘acting,’ which is one of his most effective gifts. As he walked and looked and carried his clothes even, there was a revelation of what was within ; an air of rumination and intense thought, the perpetual struggle with remorse. This is a part that shows ‘distinction,’ a precious and rare quality, ~~and~~ with which he is well endowed.

“ An extraordinary alteration, due, I believe, to the manager, was the introduction of the vision of the Jew in his sledge, a device unmeaning and illogical. In the original the morbid remorse of the guilty man is roused by the visit of a travelling Jew, which very naturally excites his perturbed spirit. But the vision discounts, as it were, and enfeebles the *second* vision. The first scene before Mathias’ entrance is perhaps drawn out to too great a length, and even in the last, stored as it is with horrors, there is some monotony and repetition. The piece would have been presented under far more favourable conditions had it been prepared by or adapted by some one of more skill and delicacy than Mr. Leopold Lewis.”

For twenty years and more this remarkable imper-

¹ These criticisms were furnished to the *Whitehall Review*, of which journal I was the regular critic during a long course of years, and also to various magazines.

sonation has kept its hold upon audiences, and whenever it is revived for an occasional performance or for a longer "run," it never fails to draw full houses ; and so it doubtless will do to the end of the actor's career. It is likely enough that it will be the piece in which he will take his farewell.

He himself was now becoming a "personality." Every one of note discovered that he was interesting in many ways, and was eager to know such a man. The accomplished Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton wrote that his performance was "too admirable not to be appreciated by every competent judge of art," and added, "that any author would be fortunate who obtained his assistance in some character that was worthy of his powers." A little later the actor took this hint, and was glad to do full justice to several pieces of this brilliant and gifted man.¹

At this time there was a clever young man "on town" who had furnished Mr. Vezin with a fine and effective play, 'The Man o' Airlie,' from a German original. He was a poet of much grace, his lines were musical, and suited for theatrical delivery ; he had

¹ Lord Lytton, to the last, was eager that new pieces of his work should find their way to the stage. But he had long since lost his cunning, and some rash managers, who made the experiment after his death, had to rue their venture. Mr. Forster once read aloud to me the 'Walpole,' a sort of poem, but no play. I have also read 'The Captives' in manuscript, which seems quite unsuited to the stage. 'Brutus,' though brought out superbly at the Princess's Theatre, failed disastrously. 'The House of Darnley,' produced at the Court Theatre, was a pleasing, interesting piece, but did not attract.

been successful as a novelist, and was, moreover, a portrait-painter in the elegant art of pastel, then but little practised. In this latter direction it was predicted that he was likely to win a high position, but the attractions of the stage were too strong for him. Becoming acquainted with the popular actor, a subject for a new creation was suggested to him by his physique and dreamy style. This was the story of the unhappy Charles I. Both the manager and the player welcomed the suggestion, and the dramatist set to work. Though possessed of true feeling and a certain inspiration, the author was carried away by his ardour into a neglect of the canons of the stage, to disregard which leads to inevitable shipwreck. In this particular case his irregularities took the shape of masses of poetry of inordinate length, which he brought to his friends at the theatre, until they at last began to despair. With unflagging zeal and extraordinary versatility the dramatist had to make many and many changes before the poem could be brought into a satisfactory shape; and, by aid of the tact and experience of the manager and his actor, the final act was at last completed to the satisfaction of all.¹

¹ Originally the piece opened with the second act, and the manager was said to have exclaimed: "Oh, bother politics, give us some domestic business." This led to the introduction of the tranquil, pastoral scene at Hampton Court. The closing scene, as devised by the author, represented the capture of the king on the field of battle. "Won't do," said the manager bluntly; "must wind up with another domestic act." Sorely perplexed by this requirement, which they felt was correct, both author and actor tried many expedients without success, until one evening, towards the small

It was brought out on September 28, 1872. Having been present on this night, I can recall the tranquil pleasure and satisfaction and absorbing interest which this very legitimate and picturesque performance imparted, while the melodious and poetical lines fell acceptably on the ear. This tranquil tone contrasted effectively with the recent tumult and agitations of 'The Bells.'

Only lately we followed the clever and popular Wills to his grave in the Brompton Cemetery. His somewhat erratic and, I fear, troubled course closed in the month of December, 1891. There was a curious suggestion, or reminiscence, of his countryman, Goldsmith, in his character and ways. Like that great poet, he had a number of "hangers-on" and admirers who were always welcome to his "bit and sup," and helped to kill the hours. If there was no bed there was a sofa. There were stories, too, of an open purse on the chimney to which people might apply. He had the same sanguine temperament as Goldsmith, and the slightest opening would present him with a magnificent prospect, on which his ready imagination would lavish all sorts of roseate hues. He was always going to make his fortune, or to make a "great hit." He had the same heedless way of talking, making warm and even ardent protestations and engagements

hours, the manager, who appeared to be dozing in his chair, suddenly called out: "Look at the last act of 'Black-eyed Susan,' with its prayer-book, chain and all." This may be legendary, and I give it for what it is worth.

which he could not help forgetting within an hour. But these were amiable weaknesses. He had a thoroughly good heart, was as sensitive as a woman, or as some women, affectionate and generous. His life, I fear, was to the close one of trouble and anxiety.

The play was written after the correct and classical French model. The opening scene, as a bit of pictorial effect—the placid garden of Hampton Court, with a startling reproduction of Vandyke's figure—has always been admired, and furnishes “the note” of the play. All through the actor presented a spectacle of calm and dignified suffering, that disdained to resent or protest; some of his pathetic passages, such as the gentle rebuke to the faithless Huntley and the parting with his children, have always made the handkerchiefs busy.

The leading actor was well supported by Miss Isabel Bateman in the character of the Queen, to which she imparted a good deal of pathetic feeling and much grace. For many years she was destined to figure in all the pieces in which he played. This, it need not be said, was of advantage for the development of her powers. Even a mediocre performer cannot withstand the inspiration that comes of such companionship; while constant playing with a really good actor has often made a good actor. But the manager, who had always some odd, native notions of his own, as to delicacy and the refinements generally, must have rather inconvenienced or disturbed—to say the least of it—our actor, by giving him as a coadjutor,

in the part of Cromwell, an effective low comedy actor of *genre*, in the person of Mr. George Belmore, who did his work with a conscientious earnestness, but with little colouring or picturesque effect. On a later occasion he supplied another performer who was yet more unsuited—viz. the late Mr. John Clayton—who used to open the night's proceedings in a light rattling touch-and-go farce, such as 'A Regular Fix.' Both these actors, excellent in their line, lacked the weight and dignified associations necessary for the high school of tragedy.¹

One of those vehement and amusing discussions which occasionally arise out of a play, and furnish prodigious excitement for the public, was aroused by the conception taken of Cromwell, which was in truth opposed to tradition; for the Protector was exhibited as willing to condone the King's offences, and to desert his party for the "consideration" of a marriage between himself and one of the King's daughters. This ludicrous view, based on some loose gossip, was, reasonably enough, thought to degrade Cromwell's character, and the point was debated with much fierceness.²

¹ I recall the manager's complacent anticipation of the success of his *coup*. "Clayton," he said, "was a clever, spirited fellow, and would assuredly make a hit in the part. He knew these things as well as anybody." He certainly played respectably, and made up by earnestness what he lacked in other points. He was particularly proud of his own "make up." But his inharmonious voice was against him, and it was impossible to take him seriously.

² There were loud cries for a piece of a certain Colonel Bates Richards on the same subject, and in which the true classical view

During the "run" of 'Charles I.' the successful dramatist was busy preparing a new poetical piece on the subject of Eugene Aram. This was produced on April 19, 1873, but the tone seemed to be too lugubrious, the actor passing from one mournful soliloquy to another. There was but little action. The ordinary versions are more effective and business-like. But the actor himself produced a deep, poetical impression.

The manager, now in the height of success, made use of the usual professional devices to enhance the attention. He adopted a style of "bold advertisement," that suggested Elliston's amusing exaggerations.¹ The piece ran for over one hundred and fifty nights to May 17, 1872, and during a portion of the time, the versatile player would finish the night with 'Jeremy

of the Protector was given. The piece was printed, and I think was actually presented.

¹ "*Lyceum: Charles I. Mr. Henry Irving.* The profound admiration that has been manifested by all classes (for the past four months) in this noble poetic play, and the unqualified approval bestowed by the most illustrious auditors upon Mr. Henry Irving's great creation of the martyr-king, have marked a new era in public taste. The manager is proud to be able to announce that the immense audiences nightly assembled render any change in the performances impossible." Or again: "*Lyceum (fifth month): Charles I. Mr. Henry Irving* in his great historical impersonation. Seats can be secured one month in advance, and additional stalls have been provided to meet the unprecedented demand." "*Lyceum: Charles I. Miss Isabel Bateman*, in her tender and exquisitely pathetic portraiture of Queen Henrietta Maria. *Mr. George Belmore*, in his vigorous and masterly assumption of Oliver Cromwell." Thus the modern Elliston.

Diddler.' Such a contrast seems too abrupt, and is moreover incongruous, as it enfeebles the impressions of the tragic element on the audience, which departs under a feeling that the emotions of the actor cannot have been very poignant, as he could turn so lightly to the grotesque or comic.¹ It might be said, indeed, that Irving has almost a *penchant* for these protracted scenes of stormy remorse and guilty retrospect. But they are often apt to impart a sense of monotony, and are not much in favour with audiences.

The new season of 1873 began on September 27, with Lord Lytton's 'Richelieu.' It is a tribute to the prowess of that gifted man that his three pieces—the ever-fresh and fair 'Lady of Lyons,' 'Money,' and 'Richelieu'—should be really the only genuine stock-pieces of the modern stage. They never seem out of fashion, and are always welcomed. It might be said, indeed, that there is hardly a night on which the 'Lady of Lyons' is not *somewhere* acted. In 'Richelieu' the actor presented a truly picturesque figure—he was aged, tottering, nervous, but rallying to full vigour when the occasion called. The well-known scene, where he invokes "the curse of Rome," produced extra-

¹ It is curious to note the changes in the form of the night's entertainment which have occurred within so short a time. The performances began at 7.15 with the favourite, 'The Happy Pair,' and concluded with another piece, the old 'Lottery Ticket.' Now, no first-class West End theatre will open its doors before eight or even half-past eight o'clock. There is scarcely a single theatre which concludes its bill of fare with a light piece, and but very few who begin with one.

ordinary enthusiasm, cheers, waving of handkerchiefs, and a general uproar from the pit. It was in this piece that those "mannerisms," which have been so often "girded at," often with much pitilessness, began to attract attention. In this part, as in the first attempt in 'Macbeth,' there was noted a lack of restraint, something hysterical at times, when control seemed to be set aside.

The first performance was thus given under rather trying conditions, and the actor was a little unnerved. The truth is, most of his attempts at this period were naturally *experiments*, and very different from those deliberate, long-prepared, and well-matured representations he offered under the responsibility of serious management.

This piece was succeeded by an original play, 'Philip,' by an agreeable writer who had made a name as a novelist, Mr. Hamilton Aidé,¹ a dramatic story of the average pattern, and founded on jealousy. It was produced on February 7, and enjoyed a fair share of success.

¹ He had attained to even a more enviable and most difficult source of success, by providing the public with a song which became known everywhere—"The Danube River"—and was heard on every organ and piano in the kingdom. I remember the manager telling me how pleased he was with the painstaking and unwearied efforts of the author.

CHAPTER V.

1874.

'HAMLET'—'OTHELLO'—'MACBETH'—DEATH OF
BATEMAN—'QUEEN MARY.'

BUT now was to be made a serious experiment, on which much was to depend. Hitherto Irving had not travelled out of the regions of conventional drama, or of what might be called romantic mélodrama ; but he was now to lay hands on the ark, and attempt the most difficult and arduous of Shakespearian characters, Hamlet. Every actor has some dream of performing the character, and fills up his disengaged moments with speculations as to the interpretation. Again and again he thinks complacently of the effects he can produce in familiar passages. The vitality of this wonderful play is such that it nearly always is a novelty for the audience ; because the character is fitfully changeful, and offers innumerable modes of interpretation. A living character, strongly marked and original, presents the same variety to those who are in contact with it ; and even in private life, friends will find an inexhaustible interest and equal uncertainty in judging the

acts and intentions of many whom they know and esteem. But in the case of notable public characters this appreciation is ever fluctuating, and there are always new judgments and revisions of judgments.

The momentous trial was made on October 31, 1874. It had long and studiously been prepared for: and the actor, in his solitary walks during the days of his provincial servitude, had often pondered over the great drama, and worked out a regular, formal conception of the character. He was prepared with a consistent view. There was much curiosity and expectation; and it was noted that so early as three o'clock in the afternoon a dense crowd had assembled in the long tunnel that leads from the Strand to the pit door. I was present in the audience, and can testify to the entrancing excitement. Nothing I have ever seen on the stage, except perhaps the burst that greeted Sarah Bernhardt's speech in 'Phædre' on the first night of the French Comedy in London, has approached the tumult of the moment when the actor, after the play scene, flung himself into the King's chair. The different judgments of the performance testify to the interest that was excited; the performance, indeed, brought out quite a body of intelligent criticism, and in this way was of benefit in cultivating public taste.

I will here give the views of an intelligent, careful, thoughtful critic, Mr. Frederic Wedmore—

“Most of us have cause to know that heretofore, with all his merits, Mr. Irving has broken now and then into rant. It was the remark of a Frenchwoman, after

Saturday's performance, that this was the first Hamlet who never ranted at all.

"As to the mere delivery of Shakespeare's words—apart from action and from facial expression—Mr. Irving's mannerism is far less noticeable than before. In praise of this delivery, we may single out one passage, given with special profundity of meaning. He is anticipating death, and it is impossible to give a greater pregnancy and depth to any words than Mr. Irving gives to these: 'If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: *the readiness is all.*' With Mr. Irving, the sense at first of his self-questioning and all-questioning temperament, and then of the particular and accidental problems which this always problem-haunted nature is born to solve, is never lost. His abstraction is always with him, though not always upon the surface of him. He jests lightly with the players—he can talk of the weather with Osric—he talks of it as naturally as any dull Cockney of to-day. But below his lightness there is always this abstraction, and it is most visible when he is most at home. That is a delicate touch of the actor's which makes him, when Horatio is offended with his 'wild and whirling words,' say, with an indifference too obvious to be permitted save in the presence only of his most chosen intimate, 'I'm sorry they offend you.' It must be quite clear to Horatio that he doesn't care a straw about it.

"In the main, the absence of all exaggerated

emphasis is to be commended in this latest Hamlet. The traditional exits are disregarded: of the final couplets no actor's 'point' is made. Speech ceases as in common talk—dies out like embers of a fire.

“Of course there are frequent flashes of passion, and one more brilliant than the rest. That one carries away the audience, leaving the actor still fully in possession of his means. It occurs in the play-scene (Act the third), when Hamlet sits as usual at the feet of Ophelia, within good view of the King, and watches him narrowly, while in the background the players play their tragedy. Mr. Irving lolls upon a wild-beast skin, and toys with it, and yawns a little while the players are mouthing what is not much to his purpose. His attention is more fixed as the application draws near, and excitement grows on him as the thing proceeds: ‘Gonzago is the Duke’s name; his wife, Baptista, you shall see anon: ’tis a knavish piece of work’—he is watching almost too eagerly to be closely keen—‘but what o’ that? Your Majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not’—*does* it, though? he is asking by his eyes—‘so let the galled jade wince: our withers are unwrung.’ And he waits again for a moment. Then, and now no longer explaining and no longer with civil though eager reassurance, the actor, crawling unawares in his excitement away from Ophelia and towards the throne, points at the King, and hisses out like an accusation, ‘He poisons him in the garden for’s estate. . . . You shall see anon how the

murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.' Whereat the King rises, and it is not so much by his rising, nor by Ophelia's word of surprise, as by the actor's seething excitement, that you perceive the enterprise has succeeded. The gradual growth of this excitement, now subtly checked, now varied by a word of reassurance or commentary—'the story is extant, and writ in choice Italian'—and now overmastering his will, so that he leaps in momentary wildness, when the King has gone—all this told so plainly upon the audience that it forgot to cheer. It hardly knew its own mind for a minute, as to any expression of approval. But when somebody began to applaud, the contagion spread. Clapping of hands got louder and louder, but the audience was not content. It rose to its feet and fairly satisfied itself at last with a great roar in recognition of this power."

Our actor judiciously took account of all criticisms, and with later performances subdued or toned down what was extravagant. The whole gained in thoughtfulness and in general meditative tone, and it is admitted that the meaning of the intricate soliloquies could not be made more distinctly, or intelligibly conveyed to an audience. He played a good deal with his face, as it is called: with smilings of intelligence, as if interested or amused. But, as a whole, his conception of the character may be said to remain the same as it was on that night.¹

¹ Some odd criticism on Irving's performance came from Mr. Harry Quilter, *à propos* of Mounet-Sully's interpretation of Hamlet.

The play was mounted with the favourite economy of the manager, and contrasted with the unsparing lavishness of decoration which characterized its later revival. But the actors were good. The sound, "full-bodied" old Chippendale was Polonius; Swinburne, also of the "old school," was the King; and the worthy Mead, long ago a star himself, and one of Mr. Phelps' corps, "delivered" the Ghost with admirable impression and elocution. It was felt that this was no derogation from his former high estate, when he played the whole round of leading characters; and this excellent training lent a weight and importance to his present efforts. In later revivals, his solemn and sonorous cadences received cordial welcome.¹ He has now passed away, after long service, to "that bourne," etc. Miss Bateman was interesting, and Mrs. Pauncefort, who is still at the Lyceum, was an excellent Queen. Actor and manager expected much success for 'Hamlet,' and counted on a run of eighty nights, but it was performed for two hundred! To the present hour it has always continued—though sparingly revived—the most interesting of the actor's performances, looked for with an intellectual curiosity.

He was a genuine Frenchman in his exaggeration and excitement, and "but is he not also a genuine *man?*" This strange question introduced a comparison with Irving in this character. "There was a lack of manhood in all his work."

¹ I have seen in an old criticism some notice of a leading performer, who in similar fashion "condescended"—so it was phrased—to the part of the Ghost, and who was praised for his impersonation, declared to be "more than usually *gentlemanlike and reputable.*" This is exquisite.

In March the hundredth night of 'Hamlet' was celebrated by a banquet, given in the saloon of the Lyceum Theatre, at which all the critics and literary persons connected with the stage were present. This method of festivity has since become familiar enough, owing to the never-flagging hospitality of the later manager of the Lyceum, and offers a striking contrast to the old days, when it was intimated that "*chicken and champagne*" was a ready method of propitiating the critics. Mr. Pigott, who had recently been appointed the Licenser of Plays, a man of many friends, from his amiability, proposed the health of the lessee, which was followed by the health of the actor and author of the establishment, the latter, as it was rather sarcastically said, "giving the hundred and odd literary men present the oft-repeated illustration of how far apart are authorship and oratory." Then up rose old "Ben" Webster, who told how, when he had seen Edmund Kean playing in Sir Giles Overreach, "he had run away from home to be an actor, and had bought a sword for the part, and yet had never yet played the character for which he had secured his first "property." The good old Chippendale next told how he had played Polonius to the Hamlet of Kemble, Kean, Young, and other famous tragedians; but protested that "the most natural and, to his mind, the most truthful representation he had seen was that of his friend here." Something must be allowed for post-prandial exuberance, and no one could more shrewdly appreciate their value than the actor himself. We may be certain

that in his "heart of heart" he did not agree that he had excelled Kemble, Kean, Young, and the others. It was interesting, however, to meet such histrionic links with the past, and which are now broken. Mr. Howe is perhaps the only person now surviving who could supply such reminiscences.

A second Shakespearian piece was now determined on, and on February 14, 1875, 'Othello' was brought out. This, it was admitted, was not a very effective performance. It was somewhat hysterical, and in his agitation the actor exhibited movements almost panther-like, with some strange and novel notes. The ascetic face, too, was not in harmony with the dusky lineaments of 'the Moor.' Here, again, his notion of the character was immature, and must have been rather hurriedly acquired.

In the full tide of this prosperity, theatre-goers were startled to learn that the shrewd and capable manager of the Lyceum was dead. This event occurred, with great suddenness, on Monday, March 22, 1875. The clever and energetic "old Colonel," as he was styled by his friends, had passed away. On the Sunday he had been at a banquet at a Pall Mall restaurant in company with his leading actor and other friends, but next day, complaining of a headache, he lay down; his daughter went as usual to the theatre, to which word was brought that he had passed away peacefully. It was thought advisable to let the performance be completed, and the strange coincidence was noted that while his child was be-

wailing the loss of her theatrical sire, the old Polonius, she was unconscious of the blow which had deprived her of her real parent.¹

There was much speculation as to what arrangement would follow, and some surprise, when it was announced that the widow was ready to step intrepidly into his place, and carry on matters exactly as before. The mainstay of the house was ready to support her, and though bound by his engagement, could, had he been so inclined, have found it easy to dissolve it, or make it impracticable. He resolved to lend his best efforts to support the undertaking, in which his views were certain to prevail. It was hardly a prudent arrangement, as the result proved, for the three years that followed were scarcely advantageous to his interest. The management was of a halting kind, without boldness, and lacking in the shrewd, safe instincts of the late manager; while the actor had the burden, without the freedom of responsibility.

At the end of the season, in July, our player came forward to make what I believe was his first managerial speech, and paid a graceful tribute to the late manager. After a modest review of their efforts, he said: "In my pride and pleasure at your approval I cannot but remember the friend whose faith in me was so firm, a friend to whom my triumphs were as dear—ay, dearer

¹ There was an odd circumstantial account given in the *Times* of an irruption of the police on the guests with "peremptory order to disperse," which, it was said, had agitated the "old Colonel," and had brought on the attack. This was proved to be a complete fiction.

I believe, than had they been his own. The announcement last autumn that I, a young actor, was thought well fitted to attempt Hamlet came from a warm and generous heart, and I cannot but deeply feel that he to whose unceasing toil and unswerving energy we owe in great measure the steadfast restoration of the poetic drama to the stage, I cannot but regret that he will never meet me, as he had done on so many occasions, to confirm your approval with affectionate enthusiasm and tears of joy." This touching tribute could not be better expressed by the most accomplished and well-trained orator, and is as unaffected as it is genuine and heartfelt. He then bespoke their aid and indulgence for the widow, and announced some future arrangements. 'Macbeth' was to be produced; and to give it extra strength an old favourite, the famous Leah of some ten years ago, Miss Bateman, "or rather Mrs. George Crowe, as a very tall friend of mine once persuaded her to call herself," would appear as Lady Macbeth. She had cancelled all her engagements, "with the womanly ambition of aiding her mother in her arduous and most courageous undertaking." To gratify the pit the farce was to be changed every month. No play was to be allowed to run more than a hundred nights. But "as wisest parents reserve the largest sugar-plum for the last," there was to be a new piece, in which Mrs. Crowe was to be the heroine. "The play will be 'Queen Mary,' and its author, Alfred Tennyson!" This *coup* brought roaring cheers.

Yet the programme was not altogether a sagacious one. The limiting the run seemed unmeaning. It struck some, too, that the excellent Mrs. Bateman was "insisting" somewhat too much upon the family element. The good-hearted, busy, and managing lady was in truth unsuited to bear the burden of a great London theatre, and what woman could be? her views were hardly "large" enough, and too old-fashioned. The public was not slow to find all this out, and the fortunes of the theatre began almost at once to change. Our actor, ambitious, and encouraged by plaudits, was eager to essay new parts; and the manageress, entirely dependent on his talent, was naturally anxious to gratify him. Here it was that the deliberation of the "old Colonel" became valuable. He would debate the question, examine it from all points, feel the public pulse, and this rational conduct influenced his coadjutor. Irving was, in truth, in a false position.

'Macbeth' was speedily got ready, and produced on September 18, 1875. Miss Bateman, of Leah fame, was the Lady Macbeth, but the performance scarcely added to her reputation. The actor, as may be conceived, was scarcely then suited, by temperament or physique, to the part, and by a natural instinct made it conform to his own particular qualifications. The conception was that of a dreamy, shrinking being, overwhelmed with terrors and remorse, speaking in whispers, and enfeebled by his own dismal ruminations. There was general clamour and fierce controversies.

over this reading, for by this time the sympathetic powers of the player had begun to exercise their attraction. He had a large and passionately enthusiastic following, but there were Guelphs and Ghibellines, Irvingites and anti-Irvingites—the latter a scornful and even derisive faction. I could fancy some of the old school, honest “Jack” Ryder, for instance, as they patrolled the Strand at mid-day, expatiating on the folly of the public “running after a fellow like that. Call *him* an actor!” Some of them had played with Macready, “and *they* should think they knew pretty well what acting was!” This resentful tone has been evoked again and again with every new actor.¹

“Objection was taken to the rather craven tone assumed, and to the helplessness set forth: also to the indistinctness of his words. During the later acts he seemed to wander to and fro, in a sort of dazed state. Still I felt that it must be that this was his principle, which was in some way ‘not understood of the people.’ That he had some steady, unrevealed purpose in his reading throughout was evident from its perfect consistency. The solution seemed to be that it was owing to something of an historic impressionalism, akin to what is found in a certain school of painters. As Elia contends, the eye does not ‘take

¹ Old Cibber thus grumbled at Garrick’s rise, and other quidnuncs at Kemble’s; and when Edward Kean came, there was the old prompter, who, when asked his opinion if he were not equal to Kemble, said: “Very clever young man indeed, very clever; but Lord bless you, sir, Mr. Kemble was a different thing altogether.”

in' all details at such moments. Macbeth, in the 'stress and storm' of his emotion, and under the influence of the supernatural, would not emphasize any of his utterances; would speak and move as in a dream; nay, his simple language would be his bearing. Sentences would be immaterial; while declamation and distinct elocution, with pointed emphasis, would be out of character and out of place. This theory may seem fanciful, but it seems to make coherent the system of the actor in this great play. It is another question whether it is tenable or legitimate."¹

Objection was taken to the uncertainty in the touches; the figure did not "stand out" so much as it ought. Much of this, however, was owing to the lack of effect in the Lady Macbeth, who, assuming hoarse and "charnel-house" tones, seemed to suggest something of Meg Merrilies. The Queen, of course, supplies half of the King's character, and this *rapport* failing him, he was at a serious disadvantage. On the later revival, however, his interpretation became bold, firm, and consistent, and on this account I shall defer treating it until I come to the proper place. It had, however, a good deal of attraction, and was played for some eighty nights.

The King, in the poem 'Queen Mary,' I have always thought one of the best, most picturesque of Irving's impersonations, from the realization it offered of the characters, impressions, feelings, of what he

¹ From my own notes at the time in the *Whitehall Review*.

represented: it was complete in every point of view. As regards its length, it might be considered trifling: but it became important because of the *largeness* of the impression left.

“ Profound was the impression made by the actor’s Philip—not by what he had to say, which was little, or by what he had to do, which was less, or by the dress or ‘make-up,’ which was remarkable. He seemed to speak by the expression of his figure and glances; and apart from the meaning of his spoken words, there was another meaning behind—viz. the character, the almost diseased solitude, the heartless indifference, and other odious historical characteristics of the Prince, with which it was plain the actor had filled himself, leaving the words he spoke and such actions as he did, to gather their colour from these. Some years ago there was a play given in which the Duke of Alva was set forth by a capable actor. There was a dress almost as rich as the Spanish King’s, with the golden fleece, the tawny beard, and the general grim ‘make-up.’ Nothing could be better than the elocution, the point given to every sentence, the truculent ferocity, the general care, in short, applied to working out the part. But it was the conception of the Duke of Alva that was left out. What was wanting to supply that personage was the air of sincerity which the true fanatic has, the assured belief in his being right, the contempt for his victims, the Spanish tone, and a host of other emotions to be learned by special study of the era and of human nature. The

actor, having reached to this, would find the part almost play itself, the mere conventional expressions of grimness, stiffness, etc., being left without emphasis, or perhaps not being required at all: for 'grimness' is not always shown by 'grim' expression. Mr. Irving's Philip took us back to the very period, and its suggestiveness actively set the mind speculating, and gave us more than what was shown. In Matthias there is the vehemence of passionate remorse as well as the air of forgetfulness in the enjoyment of domestic happiness; but there is besides the sense of a terrible secret weighing on an amiable nature and a nervous temperament, all conveyed by the bearing of the actor. One of his special gifts is here shown—viz. a pleasantly gracious manner, with an air of genuineness, ~~and~~ which no one else on the English stage at present possesses, which operates with valuable magic on the audience. But it is this general tone imparted to the character, this refining in the first part, that gives the piece its classic flavour."

Such also is the receipt that may be applied to Sir Giles Overreach, and kindred characters. This is different from the air of suffering, the silent oppression of remorse, which makes one interesting and amiable to all about him; the resigned manner being one of the effects of remorse on a noble nature. Here is one of those delicate arts which always gives pleasure to the cultivated mind; and, indeed, over the whole presentment of the character there was this impalp-

able "tone" in the bearing, voice, and pensiveness; and it was this extraordinary success which was now to rouse the jealousy, and even malignity, which followed his success in his earlier days, and was not unaccompanied with coarse ridicule and caricature, directed against the actor's legs even.¹

A letter had appeared, in January 1876, in *Fun*, the *Punch* of the middle and lower class, addressed to "The Fashionable Tragedian." It affected alarm at the report that, "so soon as the present failure can with dignity be withdrawn," he intended to startle the public and Shakespearian scholars with 'Othello.' In the name of that humanity "to which, in spite of your transcendent abilities, you cannot help belonging," he was entreated to forbear, if only for the sake of order and morality. "With the hireling fashion of the Press at your command, you have induced the vulgar and unthinking to consider you a model of histrionic ability." He was then accused of debauching the public taste with pictures of lust and cruelty. He was accountable for the disgusting taste for spectacles of crime and immorality that then prevailed. "Elevate the drama, forsooth! You have canonized the cut-throat, etc. If your performance of 'Othello' be trumpeted to the four winds of heaven by the gang of time-serving parasites in your employ, you will increase murder and degrade the drama to the level of the

¹ "Do you know," said a personage of Whistlerian principles, "do you know, it seems to me there is a great deal of *pathos* in Irving's legs, particularly in the *left leg*!"

Penny Dreadful." This might seem the ravings of a madman, and almost too ludicrous to be noticed. But the charge of suborning the Press could not be passed over, and the actor promptly brought the paper before the Police Court. There he gave a full account of himself and his plays, and a complete denial of these gross charges. 'Macbeth' had not been a failure; he modestly added, "if we speak of the play commercially;" he even offered to tell what the profit had been. He had no acquaintance with any representatives of the Press, and had none of them at his command. He believed that they were honourable gentlemen, and with some humour added: "I never heard of a hireling reporter in my life. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had got such aid;" at which remark the warmest hilarity was excited. There was some cross-examination, as might be expected, on the "murderous" qualities of the various characters assumed by the actor; and he was pressed as to the retirement of that amiable man and good critic, Mr. Dutton Cook, from the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Was he not intimate with him? "Yes," was the quiet reply, "he is a personal friend of mine, *but has always cut me up.*" Then came Mr. Toole, who declared warmly that "it was the most disgraceful libel ever written!" When he was asked about tragedies, the magistrate remarked that that "was out of his line."

In the course of the investigation the article was traced to a writer who has since become popular as

a dramatist, and who, as might be expected, has furnished a fair proportion of murders and other villainies to the stage. What was behind the attack it would be difficult to say ; but there are people to whom sudden unexpected success is a subject of irritation. Just as hypocrisy is the homage paid to vice, so it may be that the attacks of this kind are some of the penalties that have to be paid for success.

CHAPTER VI.

1876.

MRS. BATEMAN MANAGERESS—SALVINI—‘RICHARD III.’
—‘THE COURIER OF LYONS’—‘LOUIS XI.’—‘VAN-
DERDECKEN.’

WHEN the theatre closed in 1876, the indefatigable manageress organized a tour of the company in the provinces, with a view of introducing the new tragedian to country audiences. There was, as may be conceived, a prodigious curiosity to see him, and the tour was very successful. She brought to the task her usual energy and spirit of organization; though with so certain an attraction, the tour, like a good piece, might be said to “play itself”; on the principle of *ma femme et cinq poupées*.¹

¹ I can recall the image of the busy lady on one of these nights at Liverpool or Birmingham, seated in her office, surrounded with papers, the play going on close by, the music of a house crowded to overflowing being borne to the ears. There was here the old Nickleby flavour, and a primitive, homely spirit that contrasts oddly with the present brilliant system of “touring,” which must be “up to date,” as it is called, and supported by as much lavishness and magnificence as is expected in the Metropolis. After the piece came the pleasant little supper at the comfortable lodgings.

On this occasion he was to receive the first of those intellectual compliments which have since been paid him by most of the leading Universities. At Dublin he excited much enthusiasm among the professors and students of Trinity College. He was invited to receive an address from both Fellows and students, which was presented by Lord Ashbourne, lately Lord Chancellor of Ireland, but then a Queen's Counsel. This was conceived in the most flattering and complimentary terms.¹

About this time there arrived in England an Italian artist, Salvini, of great reputation in his own country. He presented himself at Drury Lane, then a great, dilapidated "Dom - Daniel" stored with ancient scenery, wardrobes, and nearly always associated with disaster. In its chilling area, and under these depressing conditions, he exhibited a very original and dramatic conception of the Moor, chiefly marked by Southern fire and passion. The earlier performances were sad to witness, owing to the meagre attendance and listless attention. In vain the actor tried to kindle the languid attention by such unexpected *trucs* as seizing his Ancient by the throat and hurling him to the ground. By and by, however, the "fashionables," seeing that here was an interesting and gifted man of

¹ On the last night of his engagement he spoke from the stage, alluding to the success of his tour in the provinces. A sensitive patriot in the gallery interrupted him, "This is not a province," but was promptly removed; for in the case of enthusiastic movements of this kind in Ireland there is no toleration. All must agree, or, as Dr. Whately pointed out, meet with the fate of "Daddy Long-Legs."

undoubted talent and fervour, a handsome foreigner to boot, began to "take him up," as it is called; he was much invited: it became "the thing" to attend his performances and admire frantically. This tribute he was certainly entitled to, for he was an artist of genius, and held a high position in his own country. His reading of the part was too fully coloured, if not melodramatic; for it seems to be the fate of all foreign artists to misunderstand the metaphysics of Shakespearian characters. The inner meaning is for them a sealed book, though they indistinctly feel its mystery. But they seize on and develop the story and business, which they interpret as they can.

It was of course likely that mean and jealous natures, who had long resented the favour enjoyed by the English actor, should here see an opportunity of setting up a rival, and of diminishing, if possible, his well-earned popularity. Comparisons of a rather offensive kind were now freely made, and it was proclaimed that here at last was a genuine actor, without the mannerisms and affectations of "The Fashionable Tragedian." This unpleasant incident is worth dwelling on, to show that the path of our tragedian to reputation was not so smooth as is supposed, and that, like men in other professions, he had to encounter and live down much that was disagreeable. The next manœuvre was to industriously spread reports that the English actor was stung by an unworthy jealousy, that the very presence of the Italian was torture to him, and that he would not even

go to see his performance. These reports were conveyed to the Italian, who was naturally hurt, and coldly stood aloof. The matter being thus inflamed, Irving, himself deeply resenting the unjust imputation made on him, felt it would be undignified to seek to justify himself for offences that he had not committed. When it was determined to give Salvini a complimentary benefit, and in the list of patrons Irving's name was not found, there was a renewal of the old insinuations. He addressed a simple satisfactory explanation to the Press. So far from abstaining from the performance, he had secured a box; an accident had prevented his meeting the foreign actor at the house of a friend, but fearing that this might be misunderstood, he had written him an explanation of his absence, which brought a most courteous reply. "And I am sure," he concluded, "Signor Salvini (*whom after all it alone concerns*) would be the last to impute any paltry motive to the absence of my name to the Round Robin circular." Exactly: it was Salvini "whom it alone concerned." Every one familiar with stage matters knows that during a long course of years no foreign actor has visited there without experiencing, not merely the lavish hospitality of the Lyceum manager, but a series of thoughtful kindnesses and services. But in the present case there were unfortunately disturbing influences at work.

Not the least disagreeable of these incidents were the offensive caricatures depicting the English actor in

every attitude of jealousy. In one a pair of scales is shown, the Italian weighing down the Englishman in spite of sacks of money.

Indeed, as the actor day by day rose in public estimation, the flood of caricatures, skits, etc. never relaxed. He could afford to smile contemptuously at these efforts, and after a time they ceased to appear. The tide was too strong to be resisted, and the lampooners even were constrained to join in the general eulogy.¹ At one of them he must have himself been amused, a little pamphlet, which dealt with his mannerisms and little peculiarities in a very unsparing way. It was illustrated with some malicious but clever sketches, dealing chiefly with the favourite topic of the "legs." My friend, Mr. William Archer, who has since become a critic of high position, about this time wrote a pamphlet in which he examined the actor's claims with some severity. Yet so judicial was the spirit of this inquiry, that I fancy the subject of it could not have been offended by it, owing to some compliments which seemed to be, as it were, extorted by the actor's merit.

The new Lyceum season opened with yet one more play of Shakespeare—'Richard III.' As might have been expected, he put aside the old, well-established Cibberian version, a most effective piece of its kind, and restored the pure, undiluted text of the Bard, to

¹ I have a vast collection of these things, filling nine or ten folio volumes, which are in fact an extraordinary tribute to the actor's success.

the gratification, it need not be said, of all true critics and cultivated persons. It was refreshing to assist at this intellectual feast, and to follow the original arrangement, which had all an air of novelty.¹

A happily-selected piece was to follow, the old melodrama of 'The Courier of Lyons,' which was brought out on May 19, 1877, under a new title, 'The Lyons Mail.' The success of 'The Bells' had shown that for a certain class of romantic melodramas the actor had exceptional gifts; and it may be added that he has a *penchant* for portraying characters of common life under exciting and trying circumstances. No one is more successful in conveying the *tone* of a character or story or situation, by his bearing and movements. Where an actor thus strongly fancies a particular "line," we may be certain that his strength is there to be found. This play is an admirable specimen of French workmanship. The characters are marked, distinct, amusing; every passage seems to add strength to the interest, and with every scene the

¹ At the close of the performance, Mr. Chippendale presented to him the sword used by Kean when playing Richard. Later a friend gave him "the George," which the great actor also wore in the part. Lady Burdett-Coutts, always one of his great admirers, added Garrick's ring, "in recognition of the gratification derived from his Shakespeare representations, uniting to many characteristics of his great predecessors in histrionic art (whom he is too young to remember) the charm of original thought." I may add that I was the medium of conveying to Irving Macready's dress as Virginius with the accompanying "tin-foil dagger," with which he used to immolate his child, at the request of Mrs. John Forster, to whose husband it had been given by the great tragedian.

interest seems to grow. Our own dramatists seem to have but little mastery of these principles : they rely chiefly upon a supply of talk, or "sparkling" dialogue. There is, in this piece, nothing but what is essential ; every detail helps forward the general purpose of the drama, and yet each detail is in itself independent and interesting. This propriety is shown in the truly humorous character of the horse-dealer, whose father "bred Daddy Longlegs," a too often repeated speech, and which eventually convicts him. The original title — 'The Courier of Lyons'—seems a more rational one than 'The Lyons Mail' ; no doubt the objection was that couriers had by this time become obsolete.

With pieces of this kind, where one actor plays two characters, a nice question of dramatic propriety arises, viz. to how far the point of likeness should be carried. In real life no two persons could be so alike, as a single person, thus playing the two characters, would be to himself. An actor must therefore make himself to a certain extent unlike himself. But here again, if the likeness be not strongly marked, there is a failure of dramatic interest ; they appear to be different persons altogether. Practically there was little likeness between the villainous Dubosc and Lesurques ; at least no such likeness as would lead ordinary persons to mistake one for the other. How, then, is the difficulty to be treated ? The solution, I believe, to be this, that likenesses of this kind, which are recognized even under disguise, are rather mental and intellectual, and depend on a peculiar expression—a glance from the

eye, smiles, etc. This is perhaps beyond histrionic art, and it seems to prove that the device in question does not belong to legitimate acting. These trifling but interesting points are really bound up with the theory of dramatic effect.¹ Irving, it must be said, contrived just so much likeness in the two characters as suited the situations and the audience also. Superficially there was a resemblance, but he suggested the distinct individualities in the proper way. The worthy Lesurques was destined to be one of his best characters, from the way in which he conveyed the idea of the tranquil, innocent merchant, so affectionate to his family and so blameless in life. Many will recall the pleasant, smiling fashion in which he would listen to the charges made against him.

A yet bolder experiment was now to be made, and another piece, in which Charles Kean made a reputation, 'Louis XI.,' was brought out on March 9, 1878. It might be said without hesitation that this is one of the most powerful, finished, and elaborate of all Irving's efforts, and the one to which we would bring, say a

¹ The absurdities which such complications engender were illustrated some years ago in the performance of a piece, I think, by Mr. Gilbert, written before he became so famous. A sprightly young man obtains admission to a community in some fairy-land, and which consisted of ladies. To obtain entrance he had to disguise himself as one of the sex, but to add more effect or piquancy to the situation, the part was allotted to a lady who was in the habit of playing men's parts. The result was an extraordinary bewilderment, for here was a woman playing the part of a man, then disguising herself or himself as a woman.

foreign actor who desired to see a specimen of the actor's talents.

Of it I wrote: "This marvellous performance has ripened and improved year by year, gaining in suggestion, fullness of detail, and perfect ease. In no other part is he so completely the character. There is a pleasant good-humour—a chuckling cunning—an air of indifference, as though it were not worth while to be angry or excited about things. His figure is a picture, and his face, wonderfully transformed, yet seems to owe scarcely anything to the 'making-up.' This is indeed one of the great performances of the stage, to be remembered hereafter. Nowhere does he speak so much with his expressive features. You see the cunning thought rising to the surface before the words. There is the hypocritical air of candour or frankness suddenly assumed, to conceal some villainous device. There is the genuine enjoyment of hypocrisy, and the curious shambling walk. How admirably graduated, too, the progress of decay and mortal sickness, with the resistance to their encroachments. Many thought that the character was dangerously akin to that of his brother king, Richard III. But the player knew his strength. It was found to be richly coloured, and varied, every note in the gamut of senile craft, wickedness, and feebleness being touched in the most elaborate and masterly style. The part was full of strokes and dashes of the mediæval devilry; there was even a Flemish tone: it was no vicious old man of our day, but had an antique quaintness. But it was the play of

features—the face anticipating every change, and rendering the speeches that followed mere illustration—that was the chief part of this remarkable performance. The extraordinary slyness which the actor can throw into his eyes, the mobility of his mouth and features, were never displayed to such advantage. ‘Making-up the face,’ as it is called, is a common art, which many ordinary actors can attain; but the true ‘making-up’ is what comes from within, and consists in making the muscles obey the mind, and take the shapes it requires. But the ‘make-up’ of Louis almost startled every one by its vividness: with the little skull cap there was a hint of the finely-chiselled features of an eminent ecclesiastical dignitary, whose face had long been the admiration and despair of painters and modellers. A critic of importance objected to the incident of the King’s interrupting himself to say the Angelus, on the ground that it ‘was too marked an exhibition of outward hypocrisy;’ and it was suggested that the mere attitude of prayer would be sufficient. But the actor did not intend to emphasize or over-act the hypocrisy. There was certainly a grotesque eagerness in his fashion, but no emphasis. It was his eccentric mode of appealing to the little images carried in his hat—an eccentricity also. This seemed one of the quaintest bits of the performance. His appearance and bearing in each of the four acts presented a distinct aspect of decay. In the first act there was the briskness and animation of a mind more youthful than the body; in the next the feebleness of decline, though

life and faculties were still in vigour ; in the third illness and weakness both of mind and body ; while in the last there was exhaustion, wasting, and death. All these views were elaborated with an astonishing power of illustration. And yet, with such elaboration, there is no lack of breadth ; the handling may be that of Meissonier, but the result is free and large. What a store of subdued grotesque is to be found in his varied powers can be seen in the distinction made between two characters that might have proved dangerously alike in the interpretation—that of Richard III. and Louis XI. In both there is that display of elderly and sardonic humour, of senile garrulity overlaid with a Voltairean cynicism. The portrait of his Richard—not the old-established, roaring, stamping Richard of the stage, but the weightier and more composed and refined—dwells long on the memory, especially such touches as his warily watching, looking from one to the other while they talk, as if cunningly striving to

¹ There is a green-room story that when Mr. Pinero was performing in 'Louis XI.' with Irving, he noted, during the rustic scene in the third act, that one of the large practicable trees was beginning to totter. In some alarm he whispered the news to his companion, who quietly replied, "Hold it up then, hold!" and went on with his part. Presently, however, the tree began to sway, and after struggling with it ineffectively and striving to better his instructions to "hold it up," it at last fell over with a crash. "Where is the Dauphin?" asked the King. Somewhat bewildered, the other answered, "I don't know." "Then let us go and find him," was the answer ; and with a sardonic leer and his hands joined behind his back, the King walked away. The curtain descended for a moment, and all was put right.

probe their thoughts ; that curious scraping of his cheek with the finger, the strange senile tones, the sudden sharp ferocity betokening the ingrained wickedness, and the special leer, as though the old fox were in good humour."

Irving naturally recalls with pleasure any spontaneous and unaffected tributes which his acting has called forth. A most flattering one is associated with ' Louis XI.'—a critical work which one of his admirers had specially printed, and which enforced the actor's view of Louis's character. " That book," said Irving, " was sent to me by a person I had never heard of. It came to me anonymously. I wished to have a second copy, and sent to the printer, who referred me to the author. I called on him, and found him one of a most agreeable family. " You will wonder," he said, " why we wrote and compiled this book. A critic had said that as nothing was really known of the character, manners, etc., of Louis XI., an actor might take what liberties he pleased with the subject. We prepared this little volume to put on record a refutation of the statement, a protest against it and a tribute to your impersonation of the character." The little work was in fact *Notes on Louis XI.*, with short extracts from *Commines' Memoirs*, London, 1878. It will be noticed in how unpretending and yet agreeable a style our actor can set out his recollections and theories. Another admirer had printed his various thoughts on Charles I. This was set off with beautifully-executed etchings, tail-pieces, etc., and the whole was richly bound and enshrined in

a casket. The name of these enthusiasts are not given.¹

A few years before this time Wagner's weird opera, 'The Flying Dutchman,' had been performed in London, and the idea had occurred to many, and not unnaturally, that here was a character exactly suited to Irving's methods. He was, it was often repeated, the "ideal" Vanderdecken. He himself much favoured the suggestion, and after a time the "Colonel" entrusted me and my friend Wills with the task of preparing a piece on the subject. For various reasons the plan was laid aside, and the death of the manager and the adoption of other projects interfered. It was, however, never lost sight of, and after an interval I got ready the first act, which so satisfied Irving that the scheme was once more taken up. After many attempts and shapings and re-shapings, the piece was at last ready—Wills having undertaken the bulk of the work, I myself contributing, as before, the first act. The actor himself furnished some effective situations, notably the strange and original suggestion of the Dutchman's being cast up on the shore and restored to life by the waves.

¹ One night, during the performance of 'Hamlet,' something was thrown from the gallery on to the stage. It fell into the orchestra, and for a time could not be found. A sad-looking working-woman called at the stage door to ask about it, and was glad to learn it was found. It was only a cheap common thing. "I often go to the gallery," she said, "and I wanted Mr. Irving to have this. I wanted him alone in the world to possess it." "This," he added, telling the story, "is the little trinket which I wear on my watch-chain."

In everything connected with the stage there is a fascination that is indescribable. Every other form of publicity pales and fades beside it; as those know who have enjoyed all the honours of print and many editions, and of bold copious advertisement, nothing approaches the charm of the footlights and the exquisite sensation of hearkening to your own words and sentiments enunciated by others. I recall the incidents of this venture, the journeys to Liverpool and Birmingham, to consult on the plot and read the piece; above all, the company of the always agreeable Irving himself, and his placid, unaffected gaiety. Indeed, to him applies forcibly the melodious lines—

“A merrier man,
Within the limits of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour withal.”

‘Vanderdecken,’ as it was called, was produced on July 8, 1878, but was found of too sombre a cast to attract. It was all, as Johnson once said, “inspissated gloom,” but there was abundant praise for the picturesque figure of the actor. Nothing could be more effective than his first appearance, when he was revealed standing in a shadowy way beside the sailors, who had been unconscious of his presence. This was his own subtle suggestion. A fatal blemish was the unveiling of the picture, on the due impressiveness of which much depended, and which proved to be a sort of grotesque daub, greeted with much tittering—a fatal piece of economy on the part of the worthy

manageress. An unusually sultry spell of summer that set in caused "the booking to go all to pieces," the box-keeper's consolatory expression. Our actor, however, has not lost faith in the subject, to this hour, and a year or two later encouraged me to make another attempt; while Miss Terry has been always eager to attempt the heroine, in which she is confident of producing a deep impression.

At this time our actor's position was a singular one. It had occurred to many that there was something strange and abnormal in the spectacle of the most conspicuous performer of his time, the one who "drew" most money of all his contemporaries, being under the direction of a simple, excellent lady, somewhat old-fashioned in her ideas, and in association with a mediocre company and economical appointments. There was here power clearly going to waste. Though his suggestions were always readily accepted, this was subject of course to the economic limitations aforesaid. It soon became evident that his talents were heavily fettered, and that he had now attained a position which, to say the least, was inconsistent with such surroundings. His own delicacy of feeling, and a sense of old obligation, which however was really slender enough, had long restrained him; but now, on the advice of friends, and for the sake of his own interests, he felt that matters could go on no longer in such a state, and that the time had arrived for making some serious change. The balancing of obligations is always a delicate matter, but it may be said that in

such cases, quite as much is returned as is received. The successful manager may "bring forward" the little-known actor, but the little-known actor in return brings fortune to the manager.

The situation was in fact a false one, and it was likely enough that unless a change were speedily made the actor's position would be compromised. Where was he to find an opening for those sumptuous tastes and artistic developments for which the public was now ripe, and which he felt that he, and he alone, could supply? This, however, was only the occasion of the separation, which must inevitably have come later; he had merely suggested a change in stage companionship: the attraction of the "leading lady" with whom he had been so long associated was not, he thought, sufficient to assist or inspire his own. As this arrangement was declined, he felt compelled to dissolve the old partnership.

It presently became known that the popular player was free, and ready to carry out the ambitious and even magnificent designs over which he had so long pondered. The moment was propitious. Except the little Prince of Wales's, there was no theatre in London that was conducted in liberal or handsome style, and no manager whose taste or system was of a large or even dignified sort. Everything was old-fashioned, meagre, and mercantile. Everything seemed in a state of languor and decay. No one thought of lavish and judicious outlay, the best economy in the end. There was really but one on whom all eyes now instinctively

rested as the only person who by temperament and abilities was fitted to restore the drama, and present it worthily, in accordance with the growing luxurious instinct of the time.

It was a rude shock for the manageress when this resolution was communicated to her. The loss of her actor also involved the loss of her theatre. She might have expostulated, with Shylock—

“You take my house, when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house.”

It followed therefore, almost as a matter of course, that the theatre, without any exertion on his part, would, as it were, drop into his hands. He at once prepared to carry out his venture on the bold and sumptuous lines which have since made his reputation. The poor lady naturally fancied that she had a grievance; but her complaint ought in truth to have been directed against the hard fate which had placed her in a position that was above her strength.¹ With

¹ Her valedictory address ran: “Mrs. Bateman begs to announce that her tenancy of the Lyceum Theatre terminates with the present month. For seven years it has been associated with the name she bears. During the three years and a half that the business management has been under her special control, the liberal patronage of the public has enabled her to wind up the affairs of each successive season with a profit. During this period ‘Macbeth’ was produced, for the first time in London, without interpolation from Middleton’s ‘Witch.’ Tennyson’s first play, ‘Queen Mary,’ was given; and Shakespeare’s ‘King Richard III.,’ for the first time in London, from the original text. Mrs. Bateman’s lease has been transferred to Mr. Henry Irving, to whose attraction as an artist the prosperity of the theatre is entirely attributable, and she confidently hopes that under his care it may attain higher artistic distinction and complete

much gallantry and energy she set herself to do battle with fortune in a new and lower sphere. She secured the old theatre at Islington, which she partially rebuilt and beautified, and on the opening night was encouraged by a gathering of her old friends, who cheered her when she appeared, supported by her two faithful daughters. Even this struggle she could not carry on long. She took with her some of her old company, Bentley, the Brothers Lyons, and others, and she furnished melodramas, brought out in a somewhat rude but effective style, suited to the lieges of the district. Later Mr. Charles Warner, greatly daring, gave a whole course of Shakespearian characters, taking us through the great characters *seriatim*. It was indeed a very astonishing programme. But the truth was, she had fallen behind the times; the old-fashioned country methods would no longer "go down." In a few years she gave up the weary struggle, and quite worn-out, passed away to join the "old Colonel."

prosperity. In conclusion, Mrs. Bateman ventures to express her gratitude for the kindness and generosity extended to her by the public—kindness that has overlooked many shortcomings, and generosity that has enabled her to faithfully carry out all her obligations to the close of her tenancy.—Lyceum, August 31, 1878."

CHAPTER VII.

1878.

THE NEW MANAGER OF THE LYCEUM—MISS TERRY—
HIS SYSTEM AND ASSISTANTS.

THE Lyceum was designed by a true architect at a time when a great theatre was considered to be a building or monument, like a public gallery or museum. In these times little is thought of but the *salle* or interior, designed to hold vast audiences in galleries or shelves, and laid out much like a dissenting chapel. The Lyceum is really a fine structure, with entrances in four different streets, an imposing portico, and an abundance of saloons, halls, chambers, and other dependences, which are necessary in all good theatres. There is a special grace in its lobby and saloon, and in the flowing lines of the interior, though they have suffered somewhat from unavoidable alterations.¹ The stage is a truly noble one, and offers the attraction of supplying a dignity and theatrical

¹ It was built in 1830, so it is now some sixty years of age. The lease, held from Lord Exeter, has not many years to run—some twenty or so, I believe.

illusion to the figures or scenes that are exhibited upon it; thus contrasting with the rather mean and miserably prosaic air which the stages of most modern houses offer. This dignified effect is secured at a heavy cost to the manager, for every extra foot multiplies the area of scenery to a costly degree, and requires many figures to fill the void. Beazeley, a pleasant humorist and writer of some effective dramas, was the architect of this fine temple, as also of the well-designed Dublin Theatre, since destroyed by fire.¹

It may be imagined that the financial portion of the transaction could have offered little difficulties. A man of such reputation inspires confidence; and there are always plenty ready to come forward and support him in his venture, his abilities being the security. A story was long industriously circulated that he was indebted to the generosity of a noble lady well known for her wealth and liberality, and who had actually "presented him with the lease of the theatre." The truth, however, was that Irving entirely relied on his own resources. According to a statement which he found it necessary to have circulated, he borrowed a sum of money on business terms, which he was enabled to pay off gradually, partly out of profits, and partly

¹ He was described by a friend as "always just arrived by the mail in time to see the fish removed, or as going off by the early coach after the last dance at four in the morning." He wrote his own epitaph—

"Here lies Samuel Beazeley,
Who lived hard and died easily."

out of a substantial legacy. His first repayments were made out of the profits of his provincial tour.

The new manager's first effort was to gather round him an efficient and attractive company. It became presently known that Miss Ellen Terry was to be his partner and supporter on the stage, and it was instantly, and almost electrically, felt that a triumph had been already secured. People could see in advance, in their mind's eye, the gifted pair performing together in a series of romantic plays; they could hear the voices blending, and feel the glow of dramatic enjoyment. So this important step was heartily and even uproariously acclaimed. No manager ever started on his course cheered by such tokens of goodwill and encouragement, though much of this was owing to a natural and selfish anticipation of coming enjoyment.

The new actress, member of a gifted family, was endowed with one of those magnetically sympathetic natures, the rarest and most precious quality a performer can have. It may be said to be "twice blessed," blessing both him that gives, and him that takes—actor and audience. She had a winning face, strangely expressive, even to her tip-tilted nose, "the Terry nose," and piquant, irregular chin: with a nervous, sinuous figure, with a voice charged with melodious, heart-searching accents. She indeed merely transferred to the stage that curious air of fitful *enjouement* which distinguished her among her friends, which often thus supplied to her performances much

that was unfamiliar to the rest of the audience. She had, in short, a most marked *personality*. She was lacking, no doubt, in strict training, and in that high methodized finish, security of touch, which is only to be secured by training. Here it is that Mrs. Kendal so excels, an actress *au bout des ongles*, possessing the whole round of histrionic arts and devices, and who can use them with a rare facility.

In her rather fitful course Ellen Terry¹ had gone on

¹ The actress is of a genuinely theatrical family. Readers of Scott's life will recall the clever industrious Terry, who was long connected with the Edinburgh stage, and had himself adapted so many of the Scott novels. Miss Terry's father was also long connected with the Edinburgh stage; her three sisters, her brother, her two children, have all found their way to the "boards." Even the precocious child performer, Minnie Terry, is different from other prodigy children, and imparts a distinction to what is usually a disagreeable sort of exhibition. I take from the pages of *The Theatre* the following minute account of Miss Terry's career:—"Miss Ellen Terry was born at Coventry on February 27, 1848. Her first appearance on the stage was made at the Princess's Theatre, under the management of Mr. Charles Kean, on April 28, 1856. On October 15, of the same year, she appeared as Puck in the revival of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' In Mr. Kean's production of 'King John,' on October 18, 1858, she acted the part of Arthur. She next appeared at the Royalty and Haymarket Theatres, and at the latter house she played in 'Much Ado About Nothing.' In March 1863 she acted Gertrude in 'The Little Treasure,' at the Haymarket. She then acted at the Queen's Theatre in Long Acre, where, on October 24, 1867, she sustained the character of Rose de Beaurepaire in 'The Double Marriage,' also in 'Still Waters Run Deep'; and, on December 26 of the same year, she acted for the first time with Mr. Henry Irving, playing Katherine to his Petruchio in 'The Taming of the Shrew.' Miss Terry then retired from the stage for some years, re-appearing on February 28, 1874, at the Queen's Theatre, as Philippa Chester in 'The

the stage, left it, and had gone on it again. Her performance at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, the little home of comedy, in the piece of 'Masks and Faces,' had left a deep impression, and I well recall the sort of passionate intensity she put into the part. It must be said that there was some uncertainty as to how she was likely to acquit herself in the very important round of characters now destined for her; but her friends and admirers were confident that her natural dramatic instincts and quick ability, together with the inspiration

Wandering Heir.' On April 18, of the same year, she acted Susan Merton in 'It's Never Too Late to Mend,' at Astley's Theatre, a performance which the *Daily News* thought worthy of 'especial mention.' Miss Terry's first 'hit,' however, was made in April 1875, when she acted Portia in 'The Merchant of Venice,' at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. At the same theatre, in May following, she acted Clara Douglas in 'Money'; and on August 7, 1875, she appeared at the Princess's Theatre, for one night only, as Pauline in 'The Lady of Lyons.' In November following she acted Mabel Vane in 'Masks and Faces'; and in May, 1876, she played Blanche Haye in 'Ours,' at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Going to the Court Theatre, in the autumn of the same year, she appeared in 'The House of Darnley,' and represented Lilian Vavaseur in 'New Men and Old Acres.'" Her first appearance was not in 1856, as so many have set down, but in 1854. This was in the part of one of the young princes "murdered in the Tower," though it has been often stated that the part was the child one of Mamilius in 'The Winter's Tale.' This was ascertained by my late friend, Dutton Cook, one of the most painstaking and accurate of men.

Two rival houses in Coventry at this moment claim to be her birthplace. A green-grocer, at No. 5, Market Street, displays a plate or placard, announcing that she was born in the house: while a haberdasher, at No. 26, over the way, protests that "This house is the original birthplace of Miss Ellen Terry, and no other. Observe the name, *Terry House*." Two other householders make the same claim. An "old nurse" declares for No. 5.

furnished by so powerful a coadjutor, would supply all deficiencies. And these provisions were to be amply justified. But it was the sympathetic, passionate, and touching performance of Olivia in Mr. Wills's version of 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' that had of necessity drawn all eyes to her. It was felt that here was an actress possessing "distinction" and original power. Indeed, there was a series of these performances at the Court Theatre under Mr. Hare's management, all which added to her reputation.

For the opening of his theatre the new manager did not much care to engage actors of mark, relying on a few sound but unpretentious performers, such as the late Mead, Swinburne, and others.¹

On his visits to Dublin the new manager had met a clever, ardent young man, who had taken share in the flattering honours offered by Trinity College. This was the now well-known Bram Stoker, whose geniality, good-nature, and tact were to be of much service to the enterprise. A short time before he

¹ Time moves so quickly on that many will have forgotten that the popular dramatist, Pinero, whose dramatic works are now in such demand, was at this time an obscure, painstaking actor, and one of the first to take service in Irving's corps. By and by he brought the manager some slight pieces, such as 'Daisy's Escape,' to serve as *leviers de rideau*. These were neatly written and full of spirit. He thus practised his pen, and as the stage was of large size, had to aim at broad, bold effects, a treatment which has been of material service in his more formal pieces. To his efforts as an actor we can scarcely extend the admiration we have for his writings; and his performance of Sir Peter Teazle at the Haymarket showed, at least, confidence in his own powers.

had held some post in one of the public offices in Dublin ; he was now offered the post of director of the theatre, or "business-manager," as it is technically called. Mr. H. Loveday had been stage-manager under the Bateman dynasty, and was continued in his office. This gentleman is really *hors ligne* in this line, being quick of resource, firm, even despotic where need requires it, and eke genial and forbearing too. The wonderful and ambitious development at the Lyceum has drawn on all his resources ; equipping him with an experience which few stage-managers have opportunities of acquiring. When, as is the case at the moment I write, a crowd of over five hundred persons pass through the stage-door of the Lyceum, during the performance of 'Henry VIII.,' a stage-manager must needs have gifts of control of a high order to maintain discipline and direct his forces. And who does not know the sagacious and ever-obliging Hurst, who has controlled the box-office for many a year !

This proper selection of officials is all important in an enterprise of this kind. Where they are well chosen they help to bind the public to the house. It is well known that our manager is well skilled in reading the book of human character, and has rarely made a mistake in choosing his followers. On their side they have always shown much devotion to the interests of their chief.

Not the least important of these assistants is an accomplished artist, Mr. Hawes Craven, the painter

of the scenery, the deviser of the many elaborate settings and tableaux which have for so long helped to enrich the Lyceum plays. The modern methods of scenery now require an almost architectural knowledge and skill, from the "built-up" structures which are found necessary, the gigantic portals and porticoes of cathedrals, houses, squares, and statues. Monumental constructions of all kinds are contrived, the details, carvings, etc., being modelled or wrought in *papier-maché* material. It may be doubted whether this system really helps stage illusion as it affects to do, or whether more sincere dramatic effects would not be gained by simpler and less laboured methods. To Mr. Craven, too, we owe the development of what is the "medium" principle—the introduction of atmosphere, of phantasmagoric lights of different tones, which are more satisfactory than the same tones when produced by ordinary colours. The variety of the effects thus produced has been extraordinary. As might be expected, the artistic instincts of the manager have here come in aid of the painter, who with much readiness and versatility has been ready to seize on the idea and give it practical shape by his craft.¹

¹ Amiable and forbearing as Irving has always shown himself to his subordinates, he can be resolute in seeing that what he wishes or wants is carried out. Praise and encouragement is forthcoming; but when it is seen that the result is not satisfactory, another and yet another trial must be made until he is satisfied. Schemes of scenery found available on trial have been thus condemned again and again from failure to bring about the effect desired. This, however, is the secret of the unity and homogeneousness of his productions. It is admitted that even in the matter of the elaborate orchestral

Mr. Craven, years ago, practised his art on the boards of the old Dublin Theatre Royal, under Mr. Harris, where his scenery attracted attention for its brilliancy and originality. His scenes had the breadth and effect of fine water-colour drawings, somewhat of the Prout school. Scenic effect is now seriously interfered with by the abundant effulgence of light in which the stage is bathed, and in which the delicate middle tints are quite submerged. The contrast, too, with moulded work is damaging, and causes the painted details to have a "poorish," flat air.

Another point to which much prominence had been given from the first at the Lyceum is the music. A fine and full orchestra—on an operatic scale almost—with excellent conductors, who were often composers of reputation, was provided. This rich and melodious entertainment sets off the play and adds to its dignity, and may be contrasted with the meagre music ordinarily provided in theatres.

Once travelling in the North, the manager met, at an hotel, a young musician, who, like himself, "was on tour," with some concert party it might be, and fell into

music, which we might fancy he would leave to the professors, he has much to say and alter. It may strike him as not being suited to the situation. Fresh experiments will have to be made, to be also set aside, to the despair of the composer. Then the *difficile* manager will be heard to attempt, vocally, some rude outline of what he desires, and this rude suggestion the ready musician will grasp and put into shape, and it will be agreed *nem. con.* that somehow this last attempt suits the situation exactly. This sense of perfect propriety is a "note" of our manager's character.

conversation with him, on their respective professions. This young man chatted freely and imparted his ideas on music in general, and on theatre music in particular. The manager was pleased with the freshness and practical character of these views, and both went their way. Long after, when thinking of a successor to Stöpel—the long-established Lyceum conductor—he recalled this agreeable companion, who was Mr. Hamilton Clarke, and engaged him, at the handsome salary of some six hundred a year, to direct the music. He was, moreover, a composer of great distinction. His fine, picturesque overtures and incidental music to 'The Merchant of Venice' and other Lyceum pieces still linger in the memory. It was to be lamented that this connection was severed. The manager later applied for aid to such composers as Sir Arthur Sullivan, Dr. Mackenzie, Sir Julius Benedict, Stanford, Jacobi, and Mr. German.

When he was thus busy with preparations for inaugurating his new ambitious venture, he had engagements to fulfil in the country, and could only rush up to town occasionally to push on the preparations. He tells how, having secured a new Horatio, a "modern young actor," as he called him, whom he had never seen perform, he came up to town especially to hear him go through his part; in fact, "I was a little fidgety," he said. After reading over the part for him which he desired to be done, Irving said, "Now you try it; I will be the Ghost." "So he began, and what a surprise it was. As Horatio he apostrophized

me in the most cool, familiar, drawing-room, conventional style possible to imagine. I was aghast. 'No, no,' I cried. 'Stop, consider the situation, its thrills of horror, the supernatural!' 'Oh, yes,' he replied, 'but how am I to do it?' 'Can't you understand it?' I said; 'try again.' He did still the same again and again. There was nothing to be done but engage another performer."

Anticipating a little, I may say here that the Lyceum company, though not affecting to contain brilliant "stars," has from the beginning exhibited a certain homogeneousness, with a number of sound conscientious actors, who have always "discharged" their characters in an effective way, suited to the requirements of the piece. With a certain logical consistency, the manager has ever considered the requirements of his audience and the theatre. The attraction, it was understood, was the two leading performers, who were to stand, as it were, before a well-studied, well-composed background. The subsidiary characters, it was felt, should set off the leading characters. The introduction of Mrs. Stirling, an actress of the first rank, in such a part as the Nurse, however welcome as a performance, almost disturbed the dramatic harmony, and made an inferior too prominent. This may seem hypercritical, but there can be no doubt as to its truth, and it shows what tact is necessary to secure an even performance. Those members of the corps who have been with him almost from the beginning the manager has thoroughly leavened with his own methods and his own spirit, thus

securing a general homogeneousness which is of immense advantage to the piece. Such useful auxiliaries include Johnson (a low comedian of the older school), Tyers, Archer (another low comedian), Haviland (a very useful performer, who improves with every year), and Andrews. Another serviceable performer was Wenman, who seemed in physique and method to be exactly suited to Burchell in the 'Olivia.' During the past seasons, however, this worthy man has been removed from the company by death. On a stranger these players might produce little effect: but the *habitués* of the theatre have grown familiar with their ways and faces and figures, and would miss them were they absent from a new play.

In addition to this permanent body, the manager is accustomed to call in to his aid performers of mark, such as Terriss, and Forbes Robertson, the former an admirable actor in special characters that are suited to his robustness, though his powers would much gain by some refining. Mr. Forbes Robertson is a picturesque performer of many resources, who can supply colour and passion at need, is always interesting, and leaves a deep impression. He has a fair share of what is called "distinction"; indeed, we wonder that his position has not ere this become more fixed and certain. But this rests on a deeper question, and is connected with the conditions of the stage at this moment, when the only course open to the player is to become a "manager-actor," and have his own theatre, otherwise he must wander from house to house.

Arthur Stirling and Macklin—excellent, well-trained actors both—have been found in recent performances at the Lyceum, as also Mr. Bishop. Of the ladies there is the excellent Mrs. Pauncefort (of the school of Mrs. Chippendale), Miss Coleridge, occasionally the vivacious Miss Kate Phillips, and Miss Emery.

CHAPTER VIII.

1878.

'HAMLET'—'THE LADY OF LYONS'—'THE IRON CHEST.'

THE new manager made some decorative alterations in the theatre which, considering the little time at his disposal, did credit to his taste and promptitude. The auditorium was treated in sage green and turquoise blue; the old, familiar "cameos" of Madame Vestris's day being of tinted ivory, while the hangings were of blue silk, trimmed with amber and gold, with white lace curtains. The ceiling was of pale blue and gold. The stalls were upholstered in blue, "a special blue" it was called; scalloped shells were used to shield the glare of the footlights. The dressing-rooms of the performers, the Royal box, and Lady Burdett-Coutts' box were all handsomely decorated and rearranged, and the whole directed by Mr. A. Darbyshire, a Manchester architect. This, however, was but the beginning of a long series of structural alterations, additions, and costly decorations, pursued over a short term of a little over a dozen years.

On Monday, December 30, 1878, the theatre was

opened with a revival of 'Hamlet.' This was the first of those glittering nights—*premières*—which have since become a feature of a London season. From the brilliancy of the company—which usually include all that is notable in the arts and professions—as well as from the rich dresses, jewels, and flowers, which suggest the old opera nights, the spectacle has become one of extraordinary interest, and invitations are eagerly sought. Here are seen the regular *habitués*, who from the first have been always invited, for the constancy of the manager to his old friends is well known.

The play was given with new scenery, dresses, music, etc. The aim was to cast over the whole a poetical and dreamy glamour, which was exhibited conspicuously in the treatment of the opening scenes when the Ghost appeared. These are invariably put very forward, taking the shape of a front cloth, which is later to ascend and reveal the great hall of state ready behind it. Hence there is but meagre accommodation for the players, and the illusion is seriously interfered with. But by the new arrangement there was plenty of space. There were the mysterious battlements seen at a distance, shadowy walls, and the cold blue of breaking day. There were fine halls, with arches and thick pillars of Norman pattern. The graveyard scene was mysterious and picturesque. Irving's version of the part was in the main the same as before, but it was noted that he had moderated it, as it were; it seemed more thoughtful. Of course much interest and speculation was excited by the new

actress, who exhibited all her charming grace and winsomeness, with a tender piteousness, when the occasion called.¹

This successful inauguration of his venture was to bear fruit in a long series of important pieces, each produced with all the advantages that unsparing labour, good taste, study, and expense could supply. Who could have dreamed, or did *he* dream on that night, that no less than nine of Shakespeare's greatest plays, a liberal education for audiences, were destined to be his contribution to "the public stock of harmless pleasure"? Every one of taste is under a serious obligation to him, from having consciously or unconsciously learnt much from this accomplished man.

On this occasion, adopting a custom since always adhered to, the manager had his arrangement of the play printed, with an introduction by a good Shakespearian student, who was destined to be a well-known figure in the *entourage* of the Lyceum. Albeit a little *tête montée*, "Frank Marshall," with his excited, bustling ways, and eccentric exterior, seems now to be much missed. He was always *bon enfant*. He had written one very pleasing comedy, 'False Shame,' and

¹ "Why," she told an interviewer this present year, "I am so high strung on a first night that if I realized there was an audience in front staring at me, I should fly off and be *down at Winchester in two twos!*" On this momentous night of trial she thought she had completely failed, and without waiting for the fifth act flung herself into the arms of a friend, repeating, "I have failed, I have failed." She drove up and down the Embankment half-a-dozen times before she found courage to go home.

also was rated as a high authority on all Shakespearian matters. He published an elaborate *Study of Hamlet*, and later induced Irving to join him in an ambitious edition of Shakespeare, which has recently been completed. He was also a passionate bibliomaniac, though not a very judicious one, lacking the necessary restraint and judgment. He had somewhat of a troubled course, like so many a London *littérateur*.

In this introduction was furnished a short and reasonable justification for such changes as were made in the play, which opened up an interesting question as to the limits of the licence which the arranger may take. I have always thought that this liberty is conceded, in the very *largeness* and fine generality with which the Bard marks out his scenes. At a critical moment no one will think of the locality, or of its divisions, decorations, etc. The Bard did not care to ticket his scenes, "a church" or "hall," etc.; he entrusted it to the arranger or actor, subject to the one law, that it was to be in harmony with, and subservient to, the broad lines of the whole and of its intellectual purport; and if the sequence of the intellectual process, that is not strained or interrupted, it may be held that the arranger has full powers to omit scenes, or alter the arrangement of the scenes.

At Univerſity time the average theatrical criticism, from lack of suitable stimulant to excite it, was not nearly so discriminating as it is now, when there is a body of well-trained, capable men, who sign their names and carry out their duty with much freedom and independ-

ence. The names of Clement Scott, Joseph Knight, William Archer, Moy Thomas, Frederic Wedmore, Nesbitt, Bendall, and others are now familiar enough ; they may smile at recent attempts made to lessen their good faith. But in these earlier days, before the revival of the drama, there were really but one or two persons whose names were known as critics of importance, or whose opinions were of any value.¹

At the opening of Irving's management there was certainly a tendency to indiscriminate and lavish panegyric. Not unnaturally, too, for all were grateful to one who was making such exertion to restore the stage to elegance. Some of the ordinary newspapers, however, overwhelmed him with their rather tedious, indiscriminate praises ; it seemed as though too much could not be said. There is no praise where *all* is praised ; nor is such very acceptable to its object. A really candid discussion on the interpretation of a character, with reasonable objections duly made, and argued out with respect, and suggestions

¹ These personages were the now almost forgotten John Oxenford of the *Times*, and Tom Taylor of the same journal. Oxenford was really "powers" in the state : they were persons whose verdict was dreaded. Taylor, besides being a dramatist of extraordinary skill and a successful actor, was moreover a dramatist of extraordinary skill and a successful actor. His pieces showed more stage-craft and better dramatic sense than those of any writer of our time. In those days it was not unusual to give a box to the critic of the *Times*, who sat there attended by a faithful henchman. Oxenford was ever tolerant and good-natured, always seeing redeeming merits. Tom Taylor was in truth a clever man, and displayed his abilities in many directions. This force of personality is rather absent in the case of our living critics.

put forward, these become of real profit to the performer. If the correction be well-founded, or if it even be urged in a hostile fashion, it will assuredly attract his notice and sink into his mind. Thus in one single short criticism on a character of Garrick's—he was once playing a gentleman disguised as a valet—Johnson has furnished not only Garrick, but all players too, with an invaluable principle which is the foundation of all acting: “No, sir; he does not let the gentleman break out through the footman.”

A new play at the Lyceum is rarely concluded without a speech being insisted upon. Irving himself has favoured this practice, but reluctantly, yielding only to the irresistible pressure of ardent and clamorous admirers. The system now obtains at every theatre where there is an “actor-manager.” But there can be no question but that it is an abuse, and a perilous one. It encourages a familiarity and often insolence, which shakes authority. The manager, when he makes his speech, seems to invite the galleries down on to his stage, and it is to be noticed that the denizens of these places are growing bolder, and I fancy, not unreasonably, that they are entitled to have *their* speech as the manager has his. Once, at Edinburgh, during a performance of ‘The Merchant of Venice,’ the students of the University had been very tumultuous, and scarcely a word was heard of the first scenes. Suddenly the drop scene descended, and the actor appeared. There was silence, when with perfect good-humour and firmness he said that owing to some misunderstanding the

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first portion of the piece had not been heard by the audience, and that he was now going to recommence the whole from the beginning. And so it was done. The play began again, and awed by this good-natured rebuke, the audience listened with all attention. This showed a readiness of resource and knowledge of character.¹

The manager has been always guided by the principle of alternating his greater attempts with others on a more moderate and less pretentious scale. With this view he brought out, on April 17, 1879, the ever-attractive 'Lady of Lyons'—which would seem naturally suited to him and his companion. He was himself in sympathy with the piece, and prepared it on the most romantic and picturesque lines. It has been usually presented in a stagey, declamatory fashion, as affording opportunity to the two leading performers for exhibiting a robustious or elocutionary passion. It was determined to tone the whole down, as it were, and present it as an interesting love story, treated with restraint. Nothing could be more pleasing than the series of scenes thus unfolded, set off by the not

¹ Recently, at the Criterion, there was a scene of the same kind on the production of 'The Fringe of Society,' and which made the judicious grieve. The gay, *debonair* Charles Wyndham came out in his high comedy, jaunty style to utter lively quips and enjoy his popularity. But rude fellows in the gallery interrupted with rough thrusts; then he paused to answer, thus recognizing them, and the retort was not so good as the thrust. And so presently the curtain, dropping, put a stop to the wrangle. But, as I said, the evil will cure itself, for the managers have begun to find out that too much familiarity with wild animals only makes them savage.

unpicturesque costumes of the revolutionary era. It is difficult to conceive now of a Pauline otherwise attired. It would seem that a play always presents itself to our manager's eye as a series of poetical scenes which take shape before him, with all their scenery, dresses, and situations. As he muses over them they fall into their place—the figures move; a happy suitable background suggests itself, with new and striking arrangements; and thus the whole order and tone of the piece furnishes him with inspiration. The more hackneyed system is the reverse of all this. The piece is fitted out with scenery, dresses, and arrangements, *secundum artem* — i. e. of a stage-manager—just as the players would be measured for their clothes.

Indeed, it must be confessed that there are few plays we would be less inclined to part with than this hackneyed and well-worn drama. The "casual sight" of that familiar title on the red-brick corner wall in some country or manufacturing town, it may be weeks old—the old paper flapping flag-like—always touches a welcome note, and the names of characters—

Claude Melnotte	MR. VAUX CLAMANT
Pauline	MISS CHARNEL

have a romantic sound; though we divine beforehand the obstreperous quality of these two declaimers. In the story there is the charm of simple effects and primitive emotion; the story is worked out without

violence or straining, and all through, the ordinary sympathies are firmly struck, and in the most touching way. Tinselly or superficial as many have pronounced the piece, there is some depth in it. So artfully is it compounded that it is possible to play the two characters in half-a-dozen different ways; and clever actors have exerted themselves to gloss over the weak spot in Melnotte's character—the one unworthy deception, which involves loss of respect. Pauline, however, is a most charming character, from the mixture of emotions; if played, that is, in a tender, impulsive way, and not made a vehicle for elocutionary display. The gracious, engaging part of the heroine has been essayed by our most graceful actresses, after being created by the once irresistible Miss Helen Faucit; and all, down to Miss Terry, Miss Anderson, and Mrs. Langtry, have increased their reputation by the performance. For over fifty years this drama has held its ground, and is always being performed. The young beginner, just stepping on the boards, turns fondly to the effective "gardener's son," and is all but certain that he could deliver the passage ending, "*Dost like the picture?*"—a burst often smiled at, but never failing to tell. Every one of the characters is good and actable, and, though we may have seen it fifty times, as most playgoers have, there is always a reserve of novelty and attraction left which is certain to interest.¹

¹ In his preface to the play the author explains that he had founded it upon his imperfect recollection of a pretty little story

On this occasion, the old, well-worn drama was so picturesquely set forth, it seemed to offer a new

called *The Bellows-Mender*. This is the exact truth, for the main or "root" idea is there suggested, viz. that of a girl being deceived into a marriage with one of low degree to gratify the revenge of a rejected suitor, and being afterwards gained over to love her low-born admirer. But the character of the author's Pauline is totally different, the original being a rather energetic person who asserted her rights in a very vigorous fashion. About the beginning of the century that republican lady, Miss Helen Maria Williams, who was a very industrious writer, published an entertaining account of travels, manners, and persons in France. In this book she represents herself as having met with an intelligent Abbé, who related to her a little tale, entitled *The History of Perourou, or the Bellows-Mender*, who relates the story himself in the first person. One night he encountered four young men in the streets, who, mysteriously addressing him by his name, insisted on his coming and supping with them. They told him that they were engravers, and that one of the party had paid his addresses to the most lovely girl in the city, the daughter of a picture-dealer, but had been disdainfully rejected by her. They opened to him their scheme, which was the one worked out in the play, that he should pass himself off as the wealthy Marquis of Rouperou, principal proprietor of mines in Dauphiny, and gain her affection and hand. With this view they regularly trained him, teaching him music, drawing, and even reading and writing, during a period of three months, which simplifies a difficulty found in the play, viz. the difficulty of the "gardener's son" assuming the manners and accomplishments of a nobleman without notice of a necessary interval to acquire them. Everything was carried out successfully: the beautiful Aurora was won. The ceremony took place. His friends and backers supplied magnificent presents, and attended the happy pair to the humble cottage, where they were received by the venerable father. The coachman was the rejected lover, who, throwing off his wig and the rest of his disguise, maliciously congratulated the young bride on her bellows-mender husband. They were eventually reconciled, as in the play: and the story concludes in a rather prosaic, business-like way by the hero announcing that in due time "Aurora made me the father of three other children," and requested that the coachman-

pastoral charm. In Irving's *Claude* there was a sincerity and earnestness which went far to neutralize these highly artificial, not to say "high-flown," passages which have so often excited merriment. But it should be remembered that the strictly poetical drama has passed away for the present: and that the once popular pieces of Sheridan Knowles and Westland Marston would be equally unacceptable.

Miss Terry, as may be conceived, was perfectly suited in her character—the ever-charming Pauline: and displayed an abundance of spontaneousness, sympathy, and tenderness.

No actor's course has been so agreeably diversified with pleasant dramatic and even romantic incidents as that of our manager. In the early flush of success, to which he must often look back with pleasure, one of the most welcome encouragements was the eager appreciation and regard of "troops of friends." The most earnest of these admirers was the estimable Lady Burdett-Coutts, who retained a box at the Lyceum, opera fashion, and was constantly seen there with large parties of her friends. The public was presently to learn with interest that the actor was to accompany her on a voyage to the Mediterranean in her yacht, *The Walrus*, and all

engraver should be godfather. "This estimable man is now the husband of a most charming woman, well known in Lyons for the care which she bestows on the education of her daughter."

Some of these details I learned from the dramatist's son, the late Earl of Lytton.

was speculation as to the party and their movements. One of her guests was an agreeable young American, named Bartlett, now better known as Mr. Burdett-Coutts, and who has since become the husband of the lady. During this pleasant voyage *The Walrus* directed her course to Venice and various Italian cities—all new and welcome to our actor, who was at the same time taking stock of the manners, customs, dresses, etc., of the country, and acquiring, as it were, the general flavour and *couleur locale*. His scene-painter had also found his way there, and was filling his sketch-book with rich “bits of colour,” picturesque streets, and buildings. The manager was, in fact, pondering over a fresh Shakespearian venture—an Italian play, which was to be produced with the new season.

It was now stated that he was about to set on the stage ‘The Merchant of Venice,’ with every aid that money and taste could supply. The moment this selection was known, it was felt almost universally that it was exactly the piece that should have been chosen. Every one anticipated by a sort of instinct what entertainment was in store for them: for here was the part and here was the actor; there would be novelty in supplanting the old traditions by the new, more romantic school. There was a general flutter of anticipation. Notwithstanding the elaborate character of the preparations, the whole was “got up” in some four weeks, though this period did not comprise the long course of private study and meditation during

which the scheme was gradually matured in his mind. When on his yachting expedition he had taken advantage of a hasty visit to Tangier to purchase Moorish costumes to be used in the Shakespearian spectacle he was preparing.

To fill up the interval he got ready Colman's drama, 'The Iron Chest,' produced on September 27, 1879. This powerful but lugubrious piece has always had an unaccountable attraction for tragedians. Sir Edward Mortimer belongs indeed to the family of Sir Giles Overreach. The character offered temptation to our actor from its long-sustained, mournful, and poetical soliloquies, in which the state of the remorseful soul was laid bare at protracted length; but, though modified and altered, the piece is hopelessly old-fashioned. It is impossible in our day to accept seriously a "band of robbers," who moreover live in "the forest"; and the "proofs" of Sir Edward's guilt, a knife and blood-stained cloth, carefully preserved in an old chest which is always in sight, have a burlesque air.¹

¹ Still in its own way it is a very fine play, and Sir Edward Mortimer an effective character. The younger Colman, its author, was a thorough master of his craft. The piece, as is well known, failed on its first production, owing to a grudge of the "great John" against the author: he had determined to ruin it by simply "walking through" the part, "having a cold," etc. This device was repeated in our time by the late Charles Kean with a play of Douglas Jerrold's which he was forced by contract to bring out, but which he contrived to stifle at its birth. "I made up my mind," says Colman, "like an unfortunate traveller, to pursue my painful journey through two stages more upon a broken-down horse." Kemble groaned, he

Irving very successfully presented the image of the tall, wan, haggard man, a prey to secret remorse and sorrow, and so abstracted in his melancholy as to be almost unconscious of what goes on about him. From the beginning to the end we see him in a series of dreamy and most expressive attitudes; whether sitting on an old-fashioned sofa, his jaded head resting on his hand, or entering sadly and mournfully from the lower end of his library. Wilford, the secretary, is by anticipation, as it were, in possession of the terrible secret of the murder, and is himself a character of much force and masterful control. He is really the complement of the leading personage. But Norman Forbes—one of the Forbes Robertson family, *ingenuus puer*, and likewise *bonæ indolis*—made of this part an engaging youth, who certainly ought to have given no anxiety in the world to a conscience-stricken murderer. This young assistant certainly mistook the true reading of the part; and the terrors of Sir Edward would have had more force and effect had he been in presence of a

lagged, he coughed, he wheezed—in short, he stalked through this play, and to the misery of the hapless and enraged author contrived to have it condemned. So good and distinct, however, was the leading character, that the public would not willingly let it die. It has always been a stock piece, and Sir Edward offers fine opportunities to a powerful actor. Even Storace, the composer of the music, shared in the general ill-luck that attended the piece, having caught a chill at the performance, which ended in his death. In this piece those useful aids to dramatic effect, the “robbers,” figure a good deal. Just at the time of its production bandits were in high favour—witness ‘The Castle of Andalusia,’ ‘The Miller and his Men,’ and a number of such pieces.

more robust and resolute personage—one who was not to be drawn off the scent, or shaken off his prey. Irving introduced here a sort of variety in his tones. It was not like the sustained grief of Eugene Aram : there were changes from high-strung denunciation into a light colloquialism which had the happiest effect. His warning to Wilford in the last act, where he repeats the oath which that unlucky individual had been compelled to take, was in the highest degree pointed, and full of the awful significance which his mobile countenance, even more expressive than usual, could lend to it. This piece well served its purpose as “a stop-gap” until the new one was ready.

CHAPTER IX.

1879.

‘THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.’

THIS great and attractive play was now ready for production. There was a tremor of excitement: all was anticipation and eager interest. The night of its production—November 1, 1879—was a festive one. The house was most brilliant: and indeed this may be accounted the first regular, official Lyceum *première*. I recall that among the audience were Tom Taylor and Henry Byron, names that seem ghost-like, so rapidly do literary shadows depart. Like some rich Eastern dream, steeped in colours and crowded with exquisite figures of enchantment, the gorgeous vision of the Lyceum pageant seems now to rise in the cold, sober daylight. As a view of Venetian life, manners, and scenery, it has never been matched. The figures seemed to have a grace that belonged not to the beings that pace, and declaim upon, the boards. Add the background, the rich exquisite dresses, the truly noble scenery—a revel of colour, yet mellowed—the elegant theatre itself crammed with an audience

that even the Lyceum had not witnessed, and it may be conceived what a night it was. The scenery alone would take an essay to itself, and it is hard to say which of the three artists engaged most excelled. The fine bit of colouring in the picture of the bridge at Shylock's house, its sombre richness and mellow details, the low key in which all was pitched, the delicate way in which the structural arrangements were contrived to blend with the painting—this was, perhaps, the best. The noble colonnade of the ducal palace was grand and imposing (we did not care so much for the general view of the palace); so was the lovely interior of Portia's house at Belmont, with its splendid amber hangings and pearl grey tones, its archings and spacious perspective. But the Court scene, with its ceiling painted in the Verrio style, its portraits of Doges, the crimson walls with gilt carvings, and the admirable arrangements of the throne, etc., surely for taste, contrivance, and effect has never been matched. The work of the whole is virtually done by the painting, not by built-up structures. Nothing on the French or on the Italian stage, where the masters of scene-painting have always been found, could have excelled these efforts. The dresses too—groupings, servants, and retainers—what sumptuousness! The pictures of Moroni and Titian had been studied for the dove-coloured cloaks and jerkins, the violet merchant's gown of Antonio, the short hats—like those of our day—and the frills. The general tone was that of one of Paolo Veronese's pictures—as gorgeous and dazzling

as the *mélange* of dappled colour in great Louvre picture.

Shylock enters—not the conventional Hebrew usurer with patriarchal beard and flowing robe, dirty and hook-nosed, but a picturesque and refined Italianized Jew, genteelly dressed: a dealer in money, in the country of Lorenzo de' Medicis, where there is an aristocracy of merchants. His eyes are dark and piercing, his face sallow, his hair spare and turning grey; he wears a black cap, a brown gaberdine faced with black, and a short robe underneath. In this first scene he is reserved, calm, and persuasive, without any fiendish emphasis, when his hate escapes him. Even the repeated "Three thousand ducats?—well!" is reflective rather than hostile. There is also an airiness and affected *bonhomie*, as in the "No, no, no, no, no! my meaning, in saying he is a good man," etc., spoken to forced smiling and lifting of the eyebrows. But a special note is the tartness of his retorts on Antonio, as if to show him that the Christian's logic was inadequate. Then comes his speech to Antonio, when he works himself into a rage, and his hatred overpowers him. But at the same time he gathers sympathy, for there is a piteous protest in the tone of his pleading: "And all for use of that which is mine own!" When Antonio answers him, quite careless of his hate, he puts on a kind of expostulatory and even gay manner, with a sort of "grin": "Why, look you, how you storm!" And when he comes to propose the particular form of the bond, he carries out the idea of its being a "merry

jest," growing so familiar as to touch his would-be creditor on the chest, who shrinks haughtily, as from contamination. Then, coming to the words, "Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken," etc., he emphasizes it with a series of grotesque "nods," and a kind of enjoyment; much indeed as some usurer would jest with a young lordling before signing.

The "Trial scene," with its shifting passions, would stamp Irving as a fine actor. A crouching, dilapidated old Hebrew of the Fagin type, clutching his scales and whetting his knife, eager for his pound of flesh, with all the mortification of a baffled usurer in the County Courts; such is the broad outline of the character too often presented by the average player, and at which he labours—or, as Gratiano says, "sweats"—piling on more and yet more of "fiendishness." See him, as he enters, having laid aside his gaberdine and stick, and arrayed in his short-skirted gown, not with flowing but tightened sleeves, so that this spareness seems to lend a general gauntness to his appearance. There he stands, with eyes half furtively, half distrustfully following the Judge as he speaks. When called upon to answer the appeal made to him "from the bench," how different from the expected conventional declaration of violent hatred! Instead, his explanation is given with an artful adroitness as if *drawn* from him. Thus, "If you deny it" being a reminder given with true and respectful dignity, not a threat; and when he further declares that it "is his humour," there is a candour which might commend his

case, though he cannot restrain a gloating look at his prey. But as he dwells on the point, and gives instances of other men's loathing, this malignity seems to carry him away, and, complacent in the logic of his illustration of the "gaping pig" and "harmless necessary cat," he bows low with a Voltairean smile, and asks, "*Are you answered?*" How significant, too, his tapping the bag of gold several times with his knife, in rejection of the double sum offered, meant as a calm business-like refusal; and the "I would have my bond!" emphasized with a meaning clutch. Then the conclusion, "Fie upon your law," delivered with folded arms and a haughty dignity; indeed, a barrister might find profit here, and study the art of putting a case with adroitness and weight. But when Antonio arrives his eyes follow him with a certain uneasy distrust, and on Bellario's letter being read out he listens with a quiet interest, plucking his beard a little nervously. As, however, he sees the tone the young lawyer takes, he puts on a most deferential and confidential manner, which colours his various compliments: "O wise young judge," "A Daniel," etc., becoming almost wheedling. And when he pleads his oath—

"Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?
No, not for Venice!"

there is a hypocritical earnestness, as if he were giving his reason privately to the counsel; though there is a strange, indescribable sneer conveyed in that "not for Venice." Then the compliment to Portia, "How

much more elder art thou than thy looks !” he utters, crouching low, with a smiling even leering admiration, but admiration given for what is on his own side. And what follows opens a most natural piece of business, arising out of the sort of confidential intimacy which he would establish between them—

“Aye, his breast ;
So says the bond ;—Doth it not, noble judge ?
Nearest his heart, those are the very words ;”

the latter words pronounced with canine ferocity, his eyes straining over the other’s shoulders, while he points with his knife—secure, too, that the other will agree with him. He fancies that he has brought over the counsel to his side. And it may be added that this knife is not flourished in the butcher’s style we are accustomed to ; it is more delicately treated, as though something surgical were contemplated.¹ When bidden to “have by some surgeon,” nothing could be better than the sham curiosity with which he affects to search the bond for such a proviso, letting his knife travel down the lines, and the tone of “I cannot find it,” in a cold, helpless way, as if he had looked, out of courtesy to his “young Judge,” who appeared to be on his side. The latter at last declares that there is no

¹ When Portia asks if the balance be ready, I doubt if the production of the scales, with the jingling chains, etc., did not somewhat lower the tone of the situation, and make it too literal. For Shylock says, not “Here they are,” but “I have them ready.” On the same principle, too, if they are to be produced I fancy it would be more natural to thrust them forward twisted together than to display them hanging down ready for weighing.

alternative, but that Antonio must yield his bosom to the knife; then the Jew's impatience seems to override his courtesies, his gloating eyes never turn from his victim, and with greedy ferocity he advances suddenly with "Come, prepare!" When, however, Portia makes her "point" about the "drop of blood," he drops his scales with a start; and, Gratiano taunting him, his eyes turn with a dazed look from one to the other—he says slowly, "Is—that—the—law?" Checked more and more in his reluctant offers, he at last bursts out with a demoniac snarl—"Why then the devil give him good of it!" Finally he turns to leave, tottering away bewildered and utterly broken. And as Gratiano utters his last offensive gibe, of whom all through he takes no more notice than a Newfoundland dog would of a little cur, he turns slowly on him and gives him one deadly look, not of hate, but of loathing contempt or scorn. This has justly been admitted to be one of the best things on the modern stage.

As may be imagined, the new Shylock excited a vast deal of controversy. The "old school" was scornful; and here again it would have been worth hearing the worthy "Jack Ryder"—whom we still must take to be the type of the good old past—on the subject.

It was argued with some force by moderate persons that this refined and gentlemanly Jew, so graceful in his manner and rich in his dress, must have been a personage of influence, and that were he the Pariah

represented, he would have taken care to assume an air of squalor and poverty, so as not to attract the attention of his persecutors. The idea of the "gentlemanly Jew" is, in fact, somewhat inconsistent with the treatment he receives through the piece. The pound of flesh incident can be made coherent by assuming that this was some half-savage, baited helot; and the fact that Antonio might safely spit upon his gaberdine is very significant as to his position. That such opposite views can be taken of one character is a tribute to the force of Shakespeare's creation.

Nothing was more remarkable than the general effect of this fine and thoughtful representation upon the public. It filled the mind as with some engrossing event; those who witnessed it took it home with them in their thoughts; as they re-entered the world of prose the beautiful Venetian scenes, the figures of the Jew and the fair Portia, remained before the eyes—memories as of some beautiful dream. It was a distinct education, too, and set every one discussing and reading. Admittedly one result, as was to happen in the case of other productions, was the great increase in the sale of editions of Shakespeare's works; and the ephemeral literature engendered in the shape of articles, criticisms, and illustrations of all kinds was truly extraordinary. Here again was heard the harsh note of the jealous and the envious. There was plenty of fair and honest dissent as to the interpretation of the play; with some reason-

ably argued protests against the over-abundant decoration.¹

By some Irving was damned with faint praise, under which there was clearly a restraint—a struggle to suppress something that would have been more severe. Credit was given to him for a certain intensity of feeling, for powerful action in particular passages ; but

¹ In the old-established and highly-respectable *Blackwood's Magazine* there appeared a very deliberate and hostile interpretation of the whole performance, with severe criticism of the manager and the leading actress. The article was clearly written by some well-cultured *littérateur* of position, and who, from the knowledge of dramatic principles exhibited, was a critic of no mean powers. But there was a venom in its comments, which was, it seemed, prompted by some personal feeling, as if in resentment of the too lavish praise. There now was no guidance, it urged, for the public, which had quite lost its critical power and had given to talents of small proportions the admiration which should be reserved for real genius. They had "gone mad" over the "feeble performances" of Sarah Bernhardt, her "meagre form, hard, immobile face, and voice of only a few notes." This splenetic outburst was followed by criticism on Miss Terry and her distinguished coadjutor, the actress being reserved for special dispraise. "At no one point in the 'Trial scene' did she indicate that she appreciated the situation, or how it should be treated." The "unqualified rapture" of those who "have racked the language of panegyric" it was impossible to countenance. She was ordinary and lacked distinction, and failed to convey an idea of the high-born lady of Belmont. This hostility was extraordinary ; but one or two pointed passages seemed to furnish a hint—*le mot de l'énigme*. Miss Terry, we were assured, was quite unequal to portray a Shakespearian dame of high degree. "Let us remember that we have had, and may again hope to have, actresses to satisfy the heart and imagination in the personation of Shakespearian women." And again : "We observe that Miss Terry, following the reading for the first time given upon the stage by Miss Helen Faucit, turns to the volume of the Venetian statutes and reads from it. But this was only one of the many touches of genius by which this great actress," etc.

his voice was broken with "painful dissonance," and "we cannot forget his cracked and screaming tones." The critics could recognize a certain advance and improvement; but the actor was "misled into dealing carelessly with his art by applause." Under this battery there were occasionally some criticisms which were reasonable enough—as when it was laid down that as the Shakespearian play was now studied as a whole, and not with reference to single characters or favourite passages, its production on the stage should be inspired by the same principle. In the Lyceum 'Merchant of Venice,' all the characters, save the leading ones, were too subdued, as it were. The general effect of the play, it was contended, as well as that of the prominent personages, is really increased by giving their proper importance to the inferior characters.

Yet another objection was taken to the methods of elocution adopted by the subordinate characters, the young Italian nobles and others. It was fancied that a sort of natural air was secured by making them speak in the vapid, careless tones of every-day life, and they were found "rattling through the fine poetical lines of the Bard in a sort of hurried chatter, to the general loss of dignity, and without allowing the audience opportunity to understand what was said." But in all this the manager had a fixed principle in view, and he had to consider what the public would accept. And there was the serious question whether a version of the play, intellectual and unalloyed, would

“go down,” as it is called; or whether in the oft-quoted phrase, such methods would not “spell Bankruptcy.” A more serious point to be considered is, whether the exhibition of these costly shows does not soon cloy, and by repetition fail to produce either astonishment or entertainment.

The hundredth night of the run of this prodigiously successful revival was celebrated in hospitable fashion by a supper to which all that was artistic, literary, and fashionable—*tout Londres* in short—was bidden. The night was Saturday, February 14, 1880, the hour half-past eleven. As soon as the piece was terminated a wonderful *tour de force* was accomplished. In an incredibly short space of time—some forty minutes, I believe—an enormous marquee, striped red and white, that enclosed the whole of the stage, was set up; the tables were arranged and spread with “all the luxuries of the season” with magic rapidity. The company meanwhile were waiting in the spacious “Beef-steak rooms,” the armoury and store-room of the theatre, whence they moved on to the improvised banqueting-room on the stage. Here an enjoyable night followed. The host’s health was given by that accomplished man, and man of elegant tastes, Lord Houghton, in what was thought a curiously *mal à propos* speech. After conventional eulogiums, he could not resist some half-sarcastic remarks as to “this new method of adorning Shakespeare.” He condemned the system of long “runs,” which he contrasted with that of his youth, when pieces were given not oftener than once or twice

in the week. He then praised the improvement in the manners of the profession, "so that the tradition of good breeding and high conduct was not confined to special families like the Kembles, or to special individuals like Mr. Irving himself, but are spread over the profession so that families of condition were ready to allow their children to go on the stage. *We put our sons and daughters into it.*" I recall now the genuine indignation and roughly-expressed sentiments of some leading performers and critics who were sitting near me at this very awkward compliment. He then proceeded to speak of the new impersonation, describing how we had seen a Shylock, formerly considered a ferocious monster, but who had, under their host's treatment, become a "gentleman of the Jewish persuasion, in voice very like a Rothschild, afflicted with a stupid servant and wilful and pernicious daughter, to be eventually foiled by a very charming woman. But he nevertheless retired as the avenger of the wrongs of centuries heaped upon him, accompanied by the tears of women and the admiration of men. He supposed that if Mr. Irving chose to personate Iago, it would be on the same principles as a very honest man, only devoted to the object of watching over Othello's wife. But there was one character Mr. Irving would never pervert or misrepresent, and that was his own, etc., etc."

Never was the power and good-humour—the *bon-homie*—of the manager more happily displayed than in

his reply. As was said at the time, it showed him in quite a new light. Taken wholly unawares, for whatever preparation he might have made was, he said, "rendered useless by the unexpected tone of Lord Houghton's remarks," he was thrown on his impromptu resources, and proved that he really possessed what is called debating power. He spoke without hesitation, and with much good sense and playful humour put aside these blended compliments and sarcasms.

In fairness it may be said that some thought that there was nothing intentionally cynical or deprecatory in what Lord Houghton had said: that it was merely a specimen of clever and graceful banter. But I can say that the effect was awkward, and that the impression left on most of the hearers was that of surprise, and perhaps of pain. It was as though there was some faint, mysterious jealousy, absurd as the notion might appear, working in his mind. This amiable and cultivated man, one of the last of the good old *finished* school, has since passed away, and his place has not been taken. The whole incident was dramatic enough, and furnished a piquancy to the entertainment.

Some time before, the manager, who was on friendly terms with the gifted Helen Faucit, determined to revive a piece in which she had once made a deep impression, viz. 'King René's Daughter.' This poem, translated by her husband, set out the thoughts and feelings of a young girl in the contrasted conditions of

blindness and of sight recovered. With a natural enthusiasm for his art, Irving persuaded the actress, who had long since withdrawn from the stage, to emerge from her retirement and play her old character "for one night only." This news really stirred the hearts of true play-goers, who recalled this actress in her old days of enchantment, when she was in her prime, truly classical and elegant in every pose, playing the pathetic Antigone. But, alas! with the old Antigone dreams, we could have wished that we had stayed away! This sort of emerging from the cloister can supply but little idea of the former gifts and glories; for the old arts are long forgotten, or the newer audience is not familiar with the old charms and methods. The actress's devices seemed to have hung too long on the "rusty nail, and seemed quite out of fashion." Irving did all he could, in an almost chivalrous style, and it was certainly a kindly act of admiration and enthusiasm for his art to think of such a revival. Such homage deserved at least tolerance or recognition.

Miss Terry herself had always fancied the character of Iolanthe, and it was now proposed to give the play as an after-piece to 'The Merchant of Venice,' a substantial meal for one night. Our heroine made a tender, natural, and highly emotional character of it. A new version or adaptation from the Danish had been made, for obvious reasons, by the trusty Wills: the piece was set off by one really lovely scene, which represented the heart of some deep grove, that seemed

almost inaccessible to us, weird and jungle-like. A golden, gorgeous light played on the trees capriciously; there was a rich tangle of huge tropical flowers; while behind, the tall, bare trunks of trees were ranged close together like sentinels. Golden doors opened with a musical chime, or clang; strange, weird music, as of æolian harps, floated up now and again. With this background, knightly figures of the Arthurian pattern and ethereal maidens were seen to float before us. Miss Terry's conception of the maid was not Miss Faucit's, which was that of a placid, rather cold, and elegant being. She cast over the character a rapture, as though she were all love and impulse, with an inexpressible tenderness and devotional trust, as when she exclaimed, "I go to find the light!" This sort of rapture also tinged Mr. Irving's character, and the audience were lifted into a region where emotion reigned supreme. The adaptation ran on more coherent and practical lines than the Martin version, which seems intended "for the closet." The restoration to sight, however, unavoidably raised metaphysical questions in the minds of those present, who had not forgotten their *Locke on the Understanding* at College, and where the relation of "extension"—awful word!—to vision is well discussed. In the text it is laid down that it is only by long experience that the eye learns that the shading or colouring of objects corresponds with the inequalities revealed by the touch. All this and much more is involved in the phenomena that attend the recovery of sight for a

person blind from birth. But these are sheer cavils that belong to the professors of natural philosophy, not to us of the dream world of lime-light and "joining-paste." Let us recall, too, how beautiful were the dresses : she in a pale blue "shape," with a white diaphanous robe floating over, about, and from her ; he in a golden tunic, with plum-coloured trunks and hose, and crimson and white mantle.

CHAPTER X.

1880.

'THE CORSICAN BROTHERS' AND 'THE CUP.'

WITH his usual tact the manager had determined on a change of entertainment which should offer a marked contrast to the classical success just obtained, and was now meditating a revival of the once popular romantic drama, 'The Corsican Brothers,' with all its spectral effects—certainly one of the best of many admirably-constructed and effective French pieces. To such a group belong the absorbing 'Two Orphans,' 'Thirty Years of a Gambler's Life,' 'Victorine,' and others. 'The Lady of Lyons' is the only one of our *répertoire* that can be put beside these ingenious efforts.

Irving's plan was, however, no mere capricious appeal to popular instincts; it represented the main principle of his management, which was to attract by alternating the classic and the romantic, at the same time ennobling and elevating, as it were, the ordinary drama by rich and elegant treatment.¹

¹ Mr. Gladstone was now about making his famous "periplus" aboard the *Glentully Castle*, and invited Irving to join what would

Meanwhile the ingenious mechanists and scenic artists of the Lyceum had long been preparing for this original and most cleverly-contrived melodrama. It indeed stands alone for the character of its effects, and for the simplicity and picturesqueness of its treatment. Some thirty years ago, when it was produced at the Princess's, the horny-voiced Charles Kean performing the Brothers, it took hold of the public with a sort of fascination—the strange music of Stöpel and the mysterious, gliding progress of the murdered brother across the stage enthralling every one. The play itself is a marvel of good workmanship; everything in it is direct and to the point; and, with so supernatural a story, all is treated in the most natural and genuine fashion. Nothing could be more admirable, for instance, than the contrast of the joyous Corsican revel, and the reconciliation sealed by the offering of a cock, as a prelude to the solemn apparition which follows. There was a story at the time that the acts, sent over from Paris in separate parcels for translation, had become transposed, the second act being placed first, and this order was retained in the representation with some benefit to the play. This may be a legend; but in proof of its truth appeal might be made to the fact that either act could come first without making any serious difference. In the first, as it now stands, the brother who is at Corsica sees the vision of the duel in Paris, and sets off for that city in

have been a most agreeable party; but theatrical engagements naturally prevented his accepting this complimentary proposal.

consequence. In the second, we see the incidents in Paris that led to that duel—thus going back—with the duel that was seen in the first act ; while the brother in Corsica is shown looking on in a vision. In the third act we take up the story at the first act, and find the brother from Corsica avenging his brother in Paris. If the present second act were put first, there might be an advantage in the two Paris acts and the two Paris duels being separated. But then there would be a loss of the sense of mystery roused by the unexplained vision of the duel, unfolded in the next act.¹

Magnificent and attractive as was the mounting of this piece at the time, it was really excelled in

¹ It is not known, perhaps, that the story was suggested to Dumas—for it appeared originally as a short romance—by an incident that occurred to Louis Blanc. The all-knowing and all “gathering-up” Timbs—himself long since gathered up—is the authority. He tells us that Louis Blanc and his brother had a close resemblance in manner, person, and features ; and, what is still more remarkable, they were connected by that mysterious feeling that, however separated the brothers might be, no accident could happen to the one without the other having a sympathetic apprehension of it. One day, while the brother of Louis was enjoying himself among a party of friends, he was observed suddenly to change colour ; he complained of a sensation as though he had received a blow upon the head, and avowed his firm conviction that something must have befallen his brother, then in Paris. The company treated this as a mere imaginary notion, but some, more curious than the rest, noted the day and hour to see how far this warning was justified by the actual event. And the result was that at the precise moment, Louis, while walking in the streets of Paris, had been knocked down by a blow upon the head, dealt by some one who approached him from behind. He fell senseless to the ground : the assailant escaped, nor could all the efforts of the police afford the slightest clue for his detection.

sumptuousness on its later revival in 1891. The experience of ten years had made the manager feel a certainty in the results of his own powers; his touch had become sure; the beautiful and striking effects were developed naturally without that undue emphasis which often disturbs the onward course of a piece. All his agents had grown skilled in the resources of the scene; and he himself, enjoying this security, and confident as would be a rider on the back of a well-trained horse, could give his undoubted fancy and imagination full range. Hence that fine, unobtrusive harmony which now reigns in all his pictures.

The piece was produced on September 18, 1880, and left an extraordinarily romantic effect on the public. Even now the very original and elegantly varied scenes come back on us as delightful reminiscences. The wonderful opera-house, the forest glades, the *salon* in Paris, all rise before us. Nor was there less art shown in the subdued tone of mystery which it was contrived to throw over the scenes. All through there was a hushed expectancy, a calm reserve. The scenes themselves, even those of reckless gaiety, seemed to strike this "awesome" note. Much as the familiar "ghost tune" was welcomed, more mysterious, as it always seemed to me, was the "creepy variation" on the original theme, devised by Mr. H. Clarke, and which stole in mournfully at some impending crisis all through the piece. There was some criticism on the D'Orsay costumes of the piece; the short-waisted waistcoats, the broad-brimmed opera hats, and the rich

cravats—*Joinvilles*, as they used to be called. These lent a piquancy, and yet were not too remote from the present time. The pattern was found in the illustrations to the French story. Terriss, it must be said, was lacking in elegance and "distinction," too brusque and ordinary. There always lingers in the memory the image of the smooth grace and courtesies of Alfred Wigan, who really made a dramatic character of the part—sympathetic and exciting interest. But when it became a commonplace Spadassin, this interest vanished. It is in these things that we miss the style, the bearing which is itself acting, without utterance of a word, and which now seems to be a lost art.¹ One result of this treatment, as Mr. Clement Scott truly pointed out, was the shifting of sympathies. "Château-Renaud was, no doubt, a villain, but he was one of the first-class, and with magnetic power in him. He had won for himself a high place. He was cold as steel and reserved. For him to deal with Louis was child's play. And yet all this was reversed, it was Louis that dominated the situation; no one felt the least apprehension for his fate." This is a judicious criticism.

Familiarity has now somewhat dulled the effect of the gliding entrance of the ghostly Louis, which at first seemed almost supernatural. The art was in making the figure rise as it advanced, and an ingenious contrivance was devised by one of the stage foremen. It was a curious feeling to find oneself in the

¹ Kean and Wigan, who charmed by their elegant swordsmanship, it was said, used to practise daily at the old Angelo school.

cavernous regions below the stage, see the manager rush down and hurriedly place himself on the trap to be worked slowly upwards. Arthur Matthison, a quaint, clever American, who had written some successful dramas, was chosen to play "the double" of the leading actor: that is, after passing behind the "practicable" tree, he was to emerge, taking care to keep his back to the audience. Unluckily for stage effect, no known art will help "to dodge Nature" in such points. She has no *replicas* in her store: makes everything distinct. And it is significant of the strong individuality which belongs to the whole body as well as to the face, that the eye will at once note the difference of expression in the outline of the figure, arms, etc. I believe no two people could be found so alike in their general appearance as to be indistinguishable—thus illustrating the late Mr. Carlyle's quaint phrase when speaking of some one whose character he had interpreted unfavourably, "*I knew it by the twist of the hip of him.*"

The use of intense light has favoured the introduction of new effects in the shape of transparent scenery; that is, of a scene that looks like any ordinary one, but is painted on a thick gauzy material. Thus, in the first act the back of the scene in the Corsican Palace is of this material, through which the tableau of the Paris duel is shown, a fierce light being cast upon it. In the original representation the whole wall descended and revealed the scene. The upper half ascending, the other offers something of a magic-lantern or phantasma-

gorian air. The same material is used in the dream in 'The Bells,' when the spectral trial is seen going on, made mysterious and misty by the interposition of this gauze.

In the duel scene one of the swords is broken by an accident; the other combatant breaks his across his knee, that the duel may proceed "on equal terms." It is not, of course, to be supposed that a sword is broken every night. They are made with a slight rivet and a little solder, the fitting being done every morning, so that the pieces are easily parted. But few note how artfully the performers change their weapons; for in the early stages of the duel the flourishings and passes would have soon caused the fragments to separate. It is done during the intervals of rest, when the combatants lean on the seconds and gather strength for the second "round," and one gets his new weapon from behind a tree, the other from behind a prostrate log.

But it is in the next act that the series of elaborate set scenes succeeding each other entail the most serious difficulties, only to be overcome in one way—viz. by the employment of an enormous number of persons. There is the great Opera House scene, which stretches back the whole length of the stage, followed almost immediately by the supper scene, with its two rooms also stretching back; to be succeeded by the remarkable forest scene, equally extensive. The difficulty, of course, is, how is one to be "cleared away" without the aid of the scene carpenters? The rich tableau curtain comes in aid here, but the

dramatic interest will not bear delay, and the curtains are only dropped for a few moments, to be raised again almost at once. Thus, by multiplying hands and organization, the changes could be made in a few seconds. Few modern scenes were more striking than that of the Opera House lit *à giorno* with its grand chandelier and smaller clusters running round. The blaze of light was prodigious; for this some five thousand feet of gas tubing had to be laid down, the floor covered with snake-like coils of indiarubber pipes, and the whole to be contrived so as to be controlled from a single centre-pipe. There were rows of boxes with crimson curtains, the spectators filling them—some faces being painted in, others being represented by living persons. Yet nothing could be more simple than the elements of this Opera House. From the audience portion one would fancy that it was an elaborately built and costly structure. It was nothing but two light screens pierced with openings, but most artfully arranged and coloured. At its close, down came the rich tableau curtains, while behind them descended the cloth with the representation of the lobby scene in the Opera House. This was followed by the double rooms of the supper party, a very striking scene. Two richly-furnished rooms, Aubusson carpets, a pianoforte, nearly twenty chairs, sofas, tables, clocks, and a supper-table covered with delicacies, champagne bottles, flowers, etc. It has been mentioned that this is succeeded almost instantly by a scene occupying the same space—that of the forest, requiring the minutest

treatment, innumerable properties, real trees, etc. This is how it is contrived. The instant the tableau curtains are dropped, the auxiliaries rush on the scene; away to the right and left fly the portions of the Parisian drawing-room: tables, chairs, piano, sofa vanish in an instant. Men appear carrying tall saplings fixed in stands; one lays down the strip of frozen pond, another the prostrate trunk of a tree—every one from practice knowing the exact place of the particular article he is appointed to carry. Others arrive with bags of sand, which are emptied and strewn on the floor; the circular tree is in position, the lime-lights ready. The transformation was effected, in what space of time will the reader imagine? In thirty-eight *seconds*, by the stage-manager's watch. By that time the tableau had been drawn aside, and Château-Renaud and his friend Maugiron were descending into the gloomy glade after their carriage had broken down.¹

¹ A curious little controversy arose as the authorship of the *Ghost Melody*. It was claimed for Mr. Stöpel, who was acting as *chef d'orchestre* at the Theatre Historique when the play was originally produced. Another claim was made for Varney, author of the stirring hymn, *Mourir pour la patrie*. Oddly enough, Stöpel, who was then at the Adelphi, could not be got "to say yes or no." "He was amused," he said, "at the importance attached to such a trifle, and could, if he chose, set the matter at rest in a few words." But he did not. Still there used to be a pianoforte piece by one Rosellen—a *Reverie*—which certainly began and went on for many bars in the same fashion. However, a copy of the music of the *Ghost Melody*, arranged for the pianoforte, and published in 1852, was unearthed, which bore on its title the words: "Composed by M. Varney, of the Theatre Historique: arranged by R. Stöpel, director of the music at the Princess's Theatre." This settled the point, and it explained the ambiguous declaration of the arranger. But I think we must assuredly

When we look back on the long series of Lyceum spectacles, we are struck by the contrasted variety and originality of the selection of pieces : this singular fertility of invention that has furnished so many visions of beauty and elegance. The conventional manager, should he succeed with one class of piece, is content to produce a series in the same *genre*. But as we call up the memories of the Lyceum performances, with what a series of picturesque visions is our memory furnished—poetical Shakespearian pageants ; romantic melodramatic stories, set forth with elegance and *vraisemblance* ; plays of pathetic or domestic interest ; exhilarating comedies ; with highly dramatic poems, written by the late Poet Laureate, Wills, and others. Indeed, who could have conceived on the opening night of the Lyceum management, when ‘ Hamlet ’ was to be brought out, that this was to be the first of a regular series—viz. nine gorgeous and ambitious presentations of Shakespearian pieces, each involving almost stupendous efforts, intellectual and physical, that we were to see in succession : ‘ The Merchant of Venice,’ ‘ Romeo and Juliet,’ ‘ Much Ado About Nothing,’ ‘ Othello,’

give the whole credit of this air to Varney. Every musician knows that there are pieces which have almost the same phrases and forms of notes, but which are essential and different in the tone and cast of air which they express, the real point and meaning of the whole being found further on, these phrases which resemble each other being merely introductory, not the essential motives. The *Reverie* is gay : the other sombre ; and, as I said, Mr. Hamilton Clarke in his varieties has found its true meaning. Thus much on this rather trivial matter, which has an interest from its associations. Stöpel, it was said, later gave Irving some trouble in America.

'Twelfth Night,' 'Macbeth,' 'Henry VIII.,' and 'King Lear!' What a gift to the public in the shape of the attendant associations, in the glimpses of Italian and other scenery, the rich costumes, the archæology! It must be confessed that this great theatre has done a vast deal, not merely to increase the public stock of harmless pleasure, but in the suggestion of refining ideas and in kindling the imagination it has indeed furnished a liberal education. It is in this fashion that a well-directed theatre *emollit mores*, and may be salutary in its influences, without conceding, however, that teaching in morals and conduct which the players so often contend it imparts.

The late Laureate, not contented with the popularity which his poems have won, always "hankered" after the entrancing publicity and excitement of the theatre. He has made many an attempt in this direction, and his list of performed dramas is a fairly long one; few, however, have enjoyed any signal success, save perhaps the last, recently produced in the United States. To one indeed—witness the unlucky 'Promise of May'—the regular "first-nighter," as he is called, was indebted for an amusing and enjoyable evening's entertainment. It must be conceded, however, that there is a dramatic tone or flavour about his pieces which is attractive, in spite of all deficiencies, and any one who would not see a touching grace and elegance in such a piece as 'The Falcon,' weak as it is in treatment, must have little taste or feeling. So with 'Queen Mary,' which had a certain grim power,

and above all, local colour. His own striking success in the character of King Philip was an agreeable recollection for Irving ; and he now lent himself with much enthusiasm to a project for bringing forward a new drama by the poet. The preparations for this elegant play were of the most lavish and unstinted kind. Nothing, literally, was spared in the outlay of either study, thought, money, or art. The manager usually follows an eclectic system, choosing his *aides* and assistants as they appeared suited to each play.¹ Thus an architect of literary tastes, Mr. Knowles, was called in to design a regular Temple-interior, which was the principal scene, and which was to be treated, *secundum artem*, in professional style. And so it rose with all its pillars and pediments "behind the scenes."

" No ponderous axes rung ;
Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung."

¹ This is a "note" of administrative sagacity. The conventional course is to be content with the "old hands," who, being successful in the previous attempts, it is assumed will be equally so in some new and unfamiliar walk. This delusion leads often to sameness, and to a tone of "old fashion." If, as Johnson once said, "we must keep our friendships in repair," we must equally renew our dependents and resources. This principle Irving has carried steadily out with much benefit to his undertakings. Thus for the music of his pieces he always secures a change of composers ; at different times he will call in the competent Mr. Grego, or Mr. and Mrs. Comyns-Carr ; he will supplement the scenery of the artistic Craven by that of other artists ; and entrust the revising or alterations of his plays now to Mr. Walter Pollock or to Frank Marshall. The reader will see that this system secures freshness and novelty ; it shows not merely unwearied exertion, but is, as I have said, *a note of sagacity*. It is the foundation of success in all intellectual professions.

The name of the new piece was 'The Cup,' a fine, "barbarian" story, strangely interesting and even fascinating. It was, of course, diffuse and expanded to inordinate length. And there were many pleasant stories afloat of the poet contending "for the dear life" for his "ewe lambs," and every line of his poetry; the manager, in his pleasant, placid way—but firm withal—quietly insisting on the most abundant compression.

The night of performance was that of January 3, 1881, when the beautiful play-poem was at last set before the audience in all its attraction. It still lingers in the memory with an inexpressible charm, breathing poetry and romance. We shall ever look back fondly to 'The Cup,' with its exquisite setting, and lament heartily that others did not so cordially or enthusiastically appreciate it. There was something so fascinating about the play, something so refining, and also so "fantastical," that though lacking the strong thews and muscles of a regular drama, it satisfied eye and ear. As it floated before us, in airy, evanescent fashion, it seemed to recall the lines that wind up the most charming of Shakespeare's plays, when the revels now had ended, and all had "melted into air, into thin air." The noble Temple, with its rich mouldings, was destined too soon, alas! to pass away into the same dark grave of so many noble creations. On the two chief characters, both full of tragic power, the eye rested with an almost entrancing interest. Never did Irving *act* better—that is, never did he

convey by his look and tones the evidence of the barbaric conception within him. There was a fine, pagan, reckless savagery, yet controlled by dignity. Miss Terry's Camma returns to the memory like the fragment of a dream. The delightful creation was brought before us more by her sympathetic bearing and motion than by speech; what music was there in those tones, pitched in low, melodious key, interpreting the music of Tennyson! Her face and outline of figure, refined and poetical as they were, become more refined still in association with the lovely scenery and its surroundings. She seemed to belong to the mythological past. There was a strange calm towards the close, and, all through, no undue theatrical emphasis or faulty tone of recitation to disturb that dreamy sense.

The bearing of the two chief performers here rose to something heroic, from its *reserve* and absence of effort. Over all of this part of the scene there seemed to be a moral concentration, as of impending doom. In *her* a sense of desperate fate and resolve: apparent favour and grace to him, which excites the wonder of her following; and the deadly resolve, which can be guessed at only by the audience. Fine, too, was the almost ecstatic air of rapture and devotion shown in the prayers and ejaculations; the exultation arising from the thought of having carried out a holy duty of punishment, when he has taken the potion.

The sort of *euthanasia* that filled the Priestess is sustained all through: in the tones of her voice, her bearing, her attitudes—the latter truly classical, sup-

ported and set off by those of her attendants. The folds of her beautiful cream and gold-coloured robe took artistic forms ; her attitude as she sat, her hands clasped about her knee ; the winding, graceful movements of her arms ; her head and face thrown back ; the strange, sympathetic tones of her voice ;—all this made her share of the drama truly sympathetic and poetical. The kind of moribund solemnity with which she answered Synorix, who nervously asked that the rites should proceed—"They—are—finished!"—as well as the enraptured way in which she invited him to drink, all this was done with a charming grace.

It was not a little disheartening to think that this "entire, perfect chrysolite" was received with a rather cold admiration, or at least not with the enthusiasm it richly merited. The apathetic crowd scarcely appreciated the too delicate fare set before it, we scarcely know why.

I suppose that it had not sufficient *robustness*, as it is called. After some weeks the manager found it needful to supplement the attraction of the play by the revived 'Corsican Brothers.' It may be conceived what a strain¹ was here on the resources not

¹ One agreeable night which was spent behind the scenes enabled me to study the admirable arrangements by which this complicated operation was carried out with smoothness and success.

No sooner has the drop-scene fallen—and a person always "stands by" to see that the huge roller is kept clear of careless spectators—than a busy scene sets in. Instantly men emerge from every side ; the hills and banks, the slopes leading down the hill, the steps and massive pedestal that flank the entrance to the Temple on the right, are lifted up and disappear gradually ; the distant landscape

merely of the actors, but even of all who were concerned with the scenery and properties. Two impor-

mounts slowly into the air ; the long rows of jets are unfastened and carried off—in three or four minutes the whole is clear. At this moment are seen slowly coming down from aloft what appear to be three long heavy frames or beams—two in the direction of the length, one across the whole breadth of the stage. These make a sort of enclosure open on one side, and form the pediment or upper portion of the Temple meant to rest on the pillars. Soon busy hands have joined these three great joists by bolts and fastenings ; the signal is given, and it begins to ascend again. Meanwhile, others have been bringing out from the “scene dock” pillars with their bases, and arranging them ; and as the great beams move slowly up to their place, they hoist with them the columns, attached by ropes which pass through. By this time all the columns are swinging in the air ; another moment, and they have dropped into their places in the pedestal. The place of each pedestal is marked on the floor. In a few moments everything is fitted and falls into its place, with an almost martial exactness. Then are seen slowly descending the other portions of the roof, sky-borders, etc., all falling into their places quietly and with a sort of mysterious growth. We have glimpses in the galleries aloft of men hauling at ropes and pulleys, or turning “drums.” Finally the whole is set and complete, and men bear in the altars and steps and the enormous idol at the back—over twenty feet high. It is worth while looking close even at the sound and effective modelling of the raised classic figures that encircle the lower portions of each column, all in good relief, such as we see in Mr. Alma Tadema’s pictures. The variety and richness of these are surprising, and they fairly bear a close inspection. They are coloured, too, with that ivory tone which the older marbles acquire. All this was wrought in the property-room, and worked in clay ; the figures then plastered over with paper, or *papier-maché*, a material invaluable to the scenic artist as furnishing relief and detail to catch the lights and shadows ; having the merit of being exceedingly light and portable, of bearing rough usage and knocking about, which carved wood would not. The idol, now looming solemnly at the back, is formed of the same material. It is curious to find that the pillars and their capitals are all constructed literally in the lines of perspective, as such would be drawn on a flat surface ; they diminish

tant pieces had to be treated and manipulated within an incredibly short space of time.

in height as they are farther off, and their top and bottom surfaces are sloped in a converging line. Thus the "building" stood revealed and complete, and round the pillars ran an open space, enclosed as it were by the walls. What with the gloom and the general mystery, the whole would pass, even to those standing by, as a very imposing structure.

It used to be customary for the manager's friends to put on a mask and domino and mingle with the gay throng of roysterers in the Opera House scene, or to take a place in one of the practicable boxes and survey the whole—and a curious scene it was. A cosy supper in the Beef-steak room, and a pleasant *causerie* through the small hours, concluded a delightful and rather original form of a night's entertainment.

CHAPTER XI.

1881.

'OTHELLO' AND 'THE TWO ROSES' REVIVED.

AT this time there came to London an American actor whose reputation in his own country was very high, and for whom it was claimed that, as a legitimate performer, he was superior to all rivals. This was Mr. Edwin Booth. He was welcomed with cordiality and much curiosity, and by none was he received with such hearty good-will as by the manager of the Lyceum. Unluckily he had made his arrangements injudiciously, having agreed to appear under a management which was quite unsuited to the proper exhibition of his gifts. The Princess's Theatre was a house devoted to melodrama of the commoner type, and was directed by commercial rather than by æsthetic principles. This mistake proved fatal. While the preparations were being made, he was offered all the civilities and attentions that were due to his position; and, in spite of the ominously insignificant methods adopted at the theatre in the "getting-up" of his pieces, he was encouraged to hope that the effect of his acting

would neutralize the somewhat rude and imperfect conditions of the *mise en scène*.¹

No great success was obtained. But the engagement had to be maintained, and a series of Shakespearian plays were brought forward one after the other. The manager, finding that there was no likelihood of success, was not inclined to waste his resources, and, no doubt to the anguish of the actor, brought out his pieces in a meagre fashion that was consistent with the traditions of Oxford Street.

In this disastrous state of things the manager of the Lyceum came to rescue his American *confrère* with a suggestion as delicately conceived as it was generous. What was done was done with. The question was, how could the mischief be repaired, and how could the dignity and position of the stranger-actor be restored? Irving generously offered him his theatre, with its splendid resources and traditions, his company, and—himself. He proposed that a Shakespearian play should be produced on the customary scale of magnificence, and that he and Booth should fill the leading characters. This handsome offer was of course accepted with gratitude, and 'Othello' was selected as the play.

The arrangements for this "Booth season," as it

¹ At a party given by Mr. Clement Scott in one of the old houses in Queen Square, the two great performers were the observed of all, as they conversed together. Every one was struck by the curious likeness, in outline at least, of the two finely-cut faces, though the expression was altogether different.

might be termed, were of an unusual and certainly laborious kind. The manager, however, was never disposed to spare himself. The programme began on May 2, 1881, when Booth was to appear as Othello, performing on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the manager playing Iago. On the other nights of the week, 'The Cup,' with the lively 'Belle's Stratagem,' was to be performed. In the following week there was the same arrangement, except that Irving took the part of Iago.¹

The night of May 2 was an exciting one, even in the list of exciting Lyceum nights. The Americans were, of course, there in great force. Irving—Booth—Ellen Terry: this surely formed, in theatrical phrase, a galaxy of talent, and the cynosure of a crowded, brilliant audience. It was indeed a charming performance—intellectual, highly-coloured, and treated

¹ One morning during the preparations I found myself in the painting-room, where Mr. Craven was busy with one of the interesting little models of scenery by which the effect can be tested. The reader may not know that the scenic artist has his model theatre, a foot or so wide, but which is made "to scale." He has also ground-plans of the stage, showing all the exits, etc., and also done to scale. By these aids the most complicated scenes can be designed and tried. I was struck with the careful, conscientious fashion in which the manager discussed a little Venetian scene, rudely painted in water-colours, and which had just been set. He saw it in connection with the entrances of the actors, and was not quite satisfied with the arrangement. He tried various devices, and proposed a gateway, which entailed making a new design. This he suggested to the painter with pleasant persuasion and kindly, apologetic courtesy, but was, as always, firm in his purpose. If a second experiment did not satisfy, it must be tried again. *Suaviter in modo*, etc., is certainly his maxim.

in the romantic fashion which the age seems to demand. The old days of lusty-throated, welkin-splitting declamation, emphasized with strides and lunges, are done with. The Italian scenery and dresses were in a rich vivid key ; to such treatment Shakespeare lends himself as readily as the author of any Porte St. Martin drama. In these Venetian and Cyprus scenes, Hawes Craven excelled himself. The colonnade of the Ducal Palace, and a dark, "fearsome" street, or lane, crossed by a slight balcony or bridge, where Cassio is waylaid ; another scene—a sort of Moorish interior, with a bright sunlit coast beyond—Desdemona's residence—these were the most effective. In this, as in so much else, the fine dramatic instinct of the actor and director are observed. He sees the scene and its "business" ; it fills in, to his mind's eye, the fitting background.

Of Irving's Iago it would be difficult to say too much. There have been always the two extremes ; one portraying the Ancient as a malignant, scowling, crafty villain, doing much work with his eyes ; the other as a kind of dapper, sarcastic, sneering personage, much after the model of Mephistopheles, this tone being emphasized by an airy, fashionable dress, as though he were some cynical Venetian "about town." In Irving was seen the man of power and capability. There was breadth of treatment—the character was coherent throughout. The keynote to the perplexing character was found in his *humour*. In "I hate the Moor!"—one of those secret, jealous, morbid brood-

ings which belong to human nature—an admirably delivered soliloquy, he strives to find some reasonable excuse for this suggestion ; “ He has done my office,” is merely accepted as a suitable pretext. The mode in which this was, as it were chased through the turnings of his soul ; the anxious tone of search, “ I know not if’t be true ” ; the covering up his face, and the motion by which he let his hands glide, revealing an elated expression at having found what would “ serve,” was a perfect exhibition of the processes of thought. The foundation was laid for the rest. A great deal of this unreasonable, unreasoning hate is at the bottom of Shylock’s mind. Light, too, was thrown on the character by a sort of clear Italian colour and character that Irving imparted. The murders and street-waylayings were all legitimate incidents of the quarrels of the day, and should not be too much emphasized as elements of horror according to modern views. This will be seen from reading memoirs like those of Cellini and others. The *hate* is a more important element. Hence he presented to us that sort of *Spadassin* bearing—the sword or dagger always ready—which is seen in pictures of gamblers by Caravaggio and others. There is the airy Italian lightness, with a determination and force not conventionally supposed to belong to the nation. All this was set off by a dress of singular appropriateness and richness ; a crimson and gold jerkin, with a mantle of dull or faded green, sometimes alternated with a short cloak and a red mantle worn on one arm,

with one of those flattened, crimson, picturesque hats seen in Moroni's pictures. Most effective, too, were certain charms and appendages of a dull-coloured silver, which furnished excellent illustration and busy work for the Italian fingers. It would take an essay to note all the admirable points of this perfectly clear, logical, and harmonious conception, even to that assumed air of sudden trepidation, "O beware, my lord, of jealousy," as though he conveyed alarm and that this was going too far, and getting serious. He suggested too, in that wonderful scene with Othello, that the points and topics were not the result of diabolic preparation, but were the answers of a ready, villainous soul to the doubts and suggestions of his unhappy friend. This is what would occur in real life.

Of Booth's Othello much has been said. In the first two acts there appeared to be a lack of vigour and the elocutionist was too present. There was a system of "points." Some critics were rude enough to say that "his make-up suggested, at times, an Indian juggler, while about the head he seemed a low-caste Bengali." He was never the "noble Moor." "He had a tendency, at times, to gobble like a turkey." "He weeps and groans and curses in a novel and somewhat grotesque manner." This was rather hard measure. But, in the scene with Iago, and above all in the scenes with Desdemona, the frantic bursts of jealousy, the command of varied tones, the by-play, the fierce ordering of Emilia and

his wife—all this was of a high class, and stirred us. In the pathetic portions there was a something artificial, especially in those long-drawn-out “croonings” which attend his utterance of ejaculations. He conveyed the idea of the Eastern—even in his figure and in his mode of bearing his sorrows—set off by writhings and sudden contortions. But the general elocutionary spirit led to a deliberation which seemed to delay passages of intense dramatic action, as where Iago is on his knees—“If thou dost slander her.” So, too, the last act, excellent as it was, seemed drawn out unduly. But it was a very sound performance, and gave satisfaction, albeit it was of a different school to that of those with whom he was acting.

Miss Terry's Desdemona was pathetic, and her piteous pleadings and remonstrances went straight to the heart. Nothing more natural could be conceived, and there was much art and judgment in emphasizing this, as it offered the completest contrast to the tempestuous scenes and tempers round her. In her snow-white robes she gained all suffrages. Excellent was her bewildered agitation at the strange, scarcely-comprehended charge against her, and her despair and grief at the strong, frantic language used to her. Indeed, the scenes between her and Othello were remarkable for the natural way in which they were done—so must any distracted husband have accused and doubted; and here, Booth, for delicacy of touch, was excellent. Mead, in his pathetic part of Brabantio, lent nature and feeling

to the early scenes ; but he was ever an excellent, sound performer. Cassio is a popular character, like Mercutio, and was given with direct vigour by Terriss. The whole is something to have seen, and will be stored in the picture-galleries of the mind, to be often visited and dwelt on with pleasure.

On the next performance the parts were interchanged. A figure, arrayed in a flowing amber robe over a purple brocaded gaberdine ; a small, snow-white turban ; a face dark, yet not "black"—such was Irving's conception of Othello, which indeed answered to our ideal of the Moor. His tall figure gave him advantage. His reading of the part again was of the romantic, passionate kind, and he leant more on the tender side of the character than on the ferocious or barbaric. In the scene of Desdemona's death or murder, there was now another and more effective arrangement ; the bed was placed in the centre of the stage, and the whole became more important and conspicuous. When it was at the side, as in the Booth arrangement, it was difficult to believe in the continued presence of the lady after her death, and there was an awkwardness in the efforts to keep in sight of the audience during the struggle. Desdemona rushes from her couch in a despairing effort to escape ; is seized in his arms by the infuriated Moor and flung back ; the curtains are then drawn and the deed accomplished. There is a fine effect here in the long silence that succeeds, broken by a loud knocking at the door, of which no notice is taken for a time,

when at last the curtain is slowly drawn away and the Moor is seen standing over his victim. There is not space to give details of the points which distinguished this conception—it is virtually a new character; but it will always be played by Irving under a disadvantage, as the play of his expressive face—the meaning, “travelling” eyes—is greatly veiled by the enforced swarthiness and Æthiop tint.

Booth's Iago had been seen before, and was much praised. It was on the old “Mephistopheles” lines, almost indicated by the peculiarly-shaped cap of that personage, lacking, however, the cock's feathers. The dress, indeed, strangely meagre and old-fashioned, scarcely harmonized with the rich costumes about him. At the end, the “Ancient” drew near to gloat with fiendish delight over Othello's dying agonies. In the same key was his attack at the end on Emilia, as though determined at least to have his revenge. So, too, his last speech. “From this time forth, I will never speak word,” was delivered with a spiteful venom, as it were, “You shall get nothing out of *me*”—and a ferocious malignity of visage. Now, in Irving's delivery of the passage there seemed to be a sort of shadowy significance, a mystery that he disdained to unfold and which others could not comprehend.

The whole of this transaction, as I have said, did honour to the English actor. Nothing more cordially hospitable could have been imagined. At the time there was a “Booth party,” who gave out that their

favourite had not had fair play at the Princess's, and that on a properly-appointed stage his superiority to all rivals would be apparent. These and other utterances were scattered about freely. Irving might have passed them by with indifference. It was certainly not his duty to share his stage with a stranger and a rival. At the same time we may give him credit for a certain delicate *finesse*, and he may have later thought, with a smiling, good-humoured complacency, that, owing to his allowing the experiment, the issue had turned out very differently from what "good-natured people" had hoped. The mortification for the American must have been the greater from the disadvantage of the contrast, which brought out in the most forcible way the want of "distinction," the stock of old, rather faded, devices with which he came provided, and which he tried on his audience with an antique gravity. Audiences have, unfortunately, but little delicacy. In their plain way they show their appreciation of whom they think "the better man" in a business-like manner; and I remember how it insisted that the encouraging applause which it gave to the new actor should be shared by his host.

It should be mentioned that the prices on this engagement were raised to the opera scale—a guinea in the stalls, half-a-guinea for the dress-circle.

When the actor took his benefit at the close of this laborious season, the theatre presented an opera-house appearance, and was filled to overflowing with a miscellany of brave men and fair women, the latter

arrayed in special splendour and giving the whole an air of rich luxury and magnificence befitting the handsomest and best-appointed theatre in the kingdom. Bouquets of unusual brilliancy and dimensions were laid in position, clearly not brought for the enjoyment of the owners. The entertainment consisted of the stock piece of 'The Bells.' Mr. Toole performed Mr. Hollingshead's farce, 'The Birthplace of Podgers,' a happy subject, which shows that the "germ" of the æsthete "business" existed twenty years ago. The feature of the night was the well-known scene from 'The Hunchback,' in which Modus is so pleasantly drawn into making a declaration. Sheridan Knowles is often ridiculed for his sham Elizabethan situations; yet it may be doubted if any living writer could treat this incident with such freshness or so naturally. It is a piece of good, wearing stuff, and will wear even better. When the scene drew up, the handsome curtains, festooned in rich and abundant folds, revealed a new effect, throwing out, by contrast, the pale greenish-tinted scene, and heightening the light so that the two figures were projected on this mellow background with wonderful brilliancy. Miss Terry's performance was full of animation and piquancy. Most remarkable, indeed, was the new store of unexpected attitudes and graces revealed at every moment—pretty stoopings, windings, sudden half turns, inviting "rallyings"—so that even a Modus more insensible to her advances must have succumbed. But in truth this wonderful creature "adorns all she touches." It is

clear that there is a Jordan-like vein of comedy in her yet to be worked. Mr. Irving's Modus was full of a quaint earnestness, and his air of helplessness in the hands of such a mistress was well maintained. Modus is generally made to hover on the verge of oafishness, so as to make it surprising that there should be any object in gaining such a being. Mr. Irving imparted a suitable air to it, and lifted the character into pure comedy.

At the end came the expected speech, delivered with a pleasant familiarity, and dwelling on past successes and future plans. As in the case of another Premier, announcement was made of "improvement for tenants" in the pit and boxes, who were to have more room—to be "rooted," if not to the soil, in their places at least. It was a pleasant and remarkable season to look back upon. The enchanting 'Cup,' which lingers like a dream, or lotus-eating fancy; the 'Corsican Brothers,' so sumptuously mounted; the splendid 'Othello,' the meeting of the American and the English actor on the same stage, and their strangely opposed readings of the same characters.

"During our five months' absence," he said, "the theatre will be closed. This, as you may imagine, will entail a very heavy expense, and I am going to make that expense still heavier by improving the ventilation and increasing your comfort in other ways, by enlarging some parts of the house, especially the pit." [A Voice in the Gallery: "Don't forget the gods."] "No, I will not 'forget the gods,' though they seem

to have deserted me rather, for I hope to do something to make them more comfortable. No doubt you are aware, ladies and gentlemen, that amongst other playful little fables about myself was the story that I had lately purchased the freehold, or leasehold, or goodness knows what, of the Lyceum, for a hundred thousand pounds. When that didn't take they put it down at fifty thousand pounds, and some persons improved upon this, and said the theatre had been presented to me. I have had no such good or evil fortune. I have not given a hundred thousand pounds—because I don't possess it; and I have not paid fifty thousand pounds for a somewhat similar reason. But what has happened is this. I have obtained a lengthened lease of the Lyceum. I shall rent some of the neighbouring houses in Exeter Street, Wellington Street, and Burleigh Street, and shall have the long-desired opportunity of greatly improving the entrances and exits and frontage of the house, not forgetting that region which is my own immediate realm—namely, behind the scenes. On our return from our tour, the next Shakespearian play I intend to present is 'Romeo and Juliet.' After 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Coriolanus' will probably be our next Shakespeare venture; but whether Mr. Marshall's play or Mr. Merivale's 'Bride of Lammermoor,' which he has written for us, or Mr. Wills's 'Rienzi' or 'Olivia' will precede it, I have not yet determined; but I intend re-opening with my friend James Albery's comedy, 'The Two Roses,' and, if all be well, on the 26th

of next December Mr. Digby Grant will be at home with his little cheque, flattered and honoured to receive any visits from inquiring friends."

The performance of 'The Belle's Stratagem,' which supplemented the attraction of 'Othello,' was interesting, as it introduced once more to active life that excellent and sound old actor, Henry Howe, who is now perhaps the only link with the generation of the great actors. It was a graceful and thoughtful act of Irving's to seek out the veteran and attach him to his company. During the decade of years that have since elapsed, he has always treated him with a kindly and courteous consideration. Every one who knows Mr. Howe—and every one who does is glad to be counted among his friends—can testify to his kindly and loving qualities. He has not the least particle of that testy discontent which too often distinguishes the veteran actor, who extols the past and is discontented with the present, because it is discontented with him, or thinks that he lags superfluous on the stage. As we have talked with him on a summer's afternoon, in his little retreat at Isleworth, the image of many a pleasant hour in the old Haymarket days has risen up with his presence. It is always pleasant to encounter his honest face in the Strand, where he lives, as he is hurrying to his work.¹

¹ This performer is associated with the best traditions of the good old school; and is linked with many interesting associations. It is curious, too, to think that he belongs, or belonged, to the Society of Friends. We have, and have had, a good many Jews upon the

In January 1882 our manager revived a piece in which he had achieved one of his earliest triumphs—'The Two Roses.' Miss Terry was at this time busily preparing for what was to be her great effort, in Juliet, and this interruption to her labours was judicious policy on the manager's part. Much had occurred during the long interval of twelve years since

stage, but a Quaker is a rarity. When he was in America, he related the story of his life to an inquirer: "I was attending a public school in Yorkshire. It was a Quaker school at Ackworth, although boys not of Quaker parentage attended it. Somehow I was always selected to recite some piece for the visitors, some of those old pieces, you know, such as *The Roman Gladiator*, or *Paul before Agrippa*. In this way I acquired my first liking for the stage. One night I went with my cousin John to the Old Drury Lane Theatre to see Kean, who was then creating a *furor* by his magnificent acting. In those days, you know, they sold good seats in the gallery for a shilling; so I and my cousin Jack paid our shilling—the usual half-price—and went into the gallery. I shall never forget that night. The playing opened, I think, with the third act. I see Kean as plainly as if it were only yesterday. There he sat, a small man, upon his throne in the middle of the stage. The vast audience, comprising the most fashionable people of that period, were waiting with breathless anticipation for the acting to begin. I drank in all these magnificent surroundings greedily, the beautiful women, their splendid dresses, the royalty, and pomp, and wealth; but I was utterly carried away with delight when Kean arose from his throne and began his superb acting. I was amazed. It surpassed anything I have ever seen. Well, after leaving the theatre, Jack and I had to cross a bridge on our way home. I sat down in the recess of the bridge, almost overcome by my emotion, and said, 'John, I am going to be an actor.' He tried to dissuade me, and laughed at the folly of the idea, but my mind was made up."

One of the most striking incidents at the recent production of 'King Lear,' was the 'ovation,' as it is called, which greeted the veteran as he presented himself in a small character.

the play had been first performed, but many still recalled with enjoyment Irving's masterly creation. When he was casting the characters for the piece, he had counted on the original Caleb Decie—Thorne, —who held the traditions of the play. Owing to some sudden change—I think to his entering on management—this arrangement had to be given up, and the manager was somewhat perplexed as to who he could find to fill the character. He happened to be in Glasgow at this time, when the local manager said to him, "There is a young fellow here who, I think, would exactly suit you ; he is intelligent, hard-working, and anxious to get on. His name is Alexander." To the superficial a recommendation of this kind would appear of little value : but to those who have the gift of choosing men, such indications, however unpretending the source, often seem an inspiration. Irving accepted the advice, and secured an actor who was of his own school, of well-defined instincts and a certain elegance, and exactly suited to be *jeune premier* of the Lyceum. It may be conceived with what delight, as he himself has told me, this unexpected opening was received by the then obscure youth ; and at a pleasant supper the new engagement was ratified. At this moment the young Glasgow candidate is the prosperous manager of the St. James's Theatre, a position which a dozen years of conscientious work has placed him in. Far more rough and thorny was the path along which Irving had to toil, during a score of years, before he found himself at the

head of a theatre. But in these *fin de siècle* times, the days and hours have doubled their value.

The piece was well mounted and well played, and there was much interest felt in comparing the new cast with the old. In a pleasant, half-sad meditation, my friend, Mr. Clement Scott, called up some of the old memories ; the tyrant Death, he said, had played sad havoc with the original companies that did so much for this English comedy. "Far away, leagues from home, across the Atlantic, sleep both Harry Montague and Amy Fawsitt. We may associate them still with Jack Wyatt and Lottie, who seemed the very boy and girl lovers that such a theme required—so bright and manly and noble, so tender, young, and handsome." David James, as I have said, had taken the place of the oleaginous Honey, and for those who had not seen the latter, was an admirable representative of the part. The "Roses" were Miss Helen Mathews and Miss Emery. Miss Fanny Josephs—a sympathetic and graceful performer—was to have been the Ida, but at the last moment was taken ill, and a substitute had to be found. There were two noticeable performances in the company—one by the well-trained Howe, who gave weight to the slight part of the solicitor with his iterated "Dear me!" the repetition of such a catchword with effect being a severe test of an actor's powers. It is, however, but a "poorish" device after all. The other was that of the blind Decie, performed by care and feeling by the new recruit, Alexander. The conventionally "robustious" Terriss

—Jack Wyatt of the night—lacked the interesting insinuating graces of the departed Montague.

The manager, in his old part, received universal praise from the entire circle of critics. Some considered it his most perfect creation, and likened it to Got's 'Duc Job' and Regnier's 'Annibal.' It was certainly a most finished and original performance; but it must be confessed that the larger stage and larger house had its effect, and tempted the actor into laying greater emphasis on details of the character. As compared with his former performances in a smaller theatre, it was the opinion of some judges that the present one was not so effective; the humorous touches were hardly so spontaneous; while many recalled the old surpassing delicacy and the effects made without effort. This change suggests that an actor cannot stand still, as it were. Repetition for a hundred nights is one of the vices of the modern stage, and leads to artificiality. Under the old *répertoire* system, when a piece was given for a few nights, then suspended to be resumed after an interval, the actor came to his part with a certain freshness and feeling of novelty.

At the same time, it should be said that the play itself was accountable for this loss of effect. It was of but an ephemeral sort, and belonged to an old school which had passed away. Other players besides Irving, conscious of this weakness, have felt themselves constrained to supplement it by these broad touchings. The average "play of commerce" is but the inspiration of the moment, and engendered by it—authors,

manager, actors, audience all join, as it were, in the composition. Every portion, therefore, reflects the tone of the time. But after a number of years this tone becomes lost or forgotten ; the fashions of feeling and emotion, both off as well as on the stage, also pass away. In the present case the performers, no doubt, were felt to be out of key or out of keeping with passions and incidents which had grown hackneyed from repetition. It is only the really great writer, whose inspiration is drawn from the permanent phenomena of nature, that is independent of ephemeral humours.

When closing his season and making the important announcement of the selection of 'Romeo and Juliet' for the new one, the manager, as we have seen, had promised some alterations and improvements in the theatre. These were duly carried out, and not only added to the comfort of the audience, but also to the profits of the management. The corridor at the back of the dress-circle was taken in and supplied some sixty or seventy new seats ; while below, on the pit floor, place was found for some two hundred additional persons, by including the saloon. Further, the arch of the gallery which impeded the view was raised, padded seats were furnished for the pit, and the manager was willing even to supply "backs" to the seats, an unusual luxury, in the gallery ; but the Chamberlain interposed, on the ground that in any panic or hurrying down the steep ascent, these might be found an obstruction. Other alterations were made in the

exits and entrances—though these were merely in the nature of makeshifts. But the manager was not content until, many years later, he had purchased the adjoining house and thoroughly remodelled the whole.¹

The manager, in the interval, took his company on a provincial tour to the leading towns. At Glasgow it was announced to be “the greatest engagement ever witnessed in that city.” As he told his audience on the last night, the receipts for the twelve nights amounted to over £4000—an average of £334 per night. But the extraordinary “drawing” power of our actor was never exhibited more signally than during the engagement at Edinburgh, at Mr. Howard’s Theatre, which produced results that were really unprecedented. On his last appearance Irving told the audience that “this engagement—and you

¹ For a time the house was “on crutches,” as it is called, an operation of considerable architectural delicacy. In the great “cellarage” below the stage, huge store-houses filled with the rubbish of half a century, were discovered masses of decayed peacocks’ feathers, which much perplexed the explorers and everybody else, until it was recalled that these were the antique “properties” used by Madame Vestris in one of her *Planchè* burlesques. The labour was herculean, and the indefatigable Bram Stoker threw himself with heart and soul into the business. We might lament, however, that the beautiful interior suffered somewhat in the later alterations. The elegant contour was disturbed; the double pillars, which recurred periodically in the dress tier, were reduced to a single one. The fine entrance hall lost its symmetry from being enlarged. But such sacrifices are absolutely necessary, and are not the first that have to be made under “the form and pressure of the time.” The alterations cost a very large sum indeed, but our manager has always been an improving tenant, and has periodically laid out vast sums on the improvement and decoration of his house.

must not take it for egotism—has been the most remarkable one played for any twelve nights in any theatre I should think in Great Britain, certainly out of London, and there are some large theatres in London. There has never been any engagement that has equalled this in your city. It has excelled any operatic or dramatic engagement in respect of the enormous amount of money that has been realized." This was a bold challenge, but it was to be more than justified. "I may tell you that there has been taken during the engagement here £4300, which is certainly the largest sum ever had before in any theatre during the space of time, and I believe it is perfectly unprecedented in any city." This was a tribute to his attraction. On his departure a gold repeater watch was presented to him.

CHAPTER XII.

1882.

'ROMEO AND JULIET'—THE BANQUET.

By March 8, 1882, the great revival of 'Romeo and Juliet' was ready. For this performance the manager drew upon all the resources of his taste, purse, study, and experience. The fascinating play, indeed, offered opportunities for adornment only too tempting. Those glittering, bewitching pictures still linger in the memory of the playgoer, though more than ten years have elapsed since the opening night. In his modest address in the play-bill, he took credit, as he was entitled to do, for availing himself "of every resource at his command to illustrate, without intrusion, the Italian warmth, life, and romance of this enthralling Italian story." Any changes made were limited to such as were required by the fuller development of the stage, which the poet himself would have freely availed himself of. "Among the restorations will be found that of Romeo's unrequited love for Rosaline, omitted, among other things, in Garrick's version. Its value can hardly be over-appreciated, since Shakespeare has

carefully worked out this first baseless love of Romeo as palpable evidence of the subjective nature of the man and his passion. He had secured the co-operation of some of the distinguished representatives of our time of the various arts." A short and business-like address that was of assistance to an audience.

Those who came away from the Lyceum on that opening night must have had a sense almost of bewilderment, so rich and dazzling were the scenes of light and colour that had for hours passed before their eyes. According to the true illusive principle in use on this stage, the lights are lowered as every scene is about to change, by which a sense of mystery is produced, and the prosaic mechanism of the movement is shrouded. Hence, a sort of richness of effect and surprise as the gloom passes away and a gorgeous scene steeped in effulgence and colour is revealed. It would take long to detail the beautiful views, streets, palaces, chambers, dresses, groupings, that were set before the audience, all devised with an extraordinary originality and fertility of resource; though this was the third of these Italian revivals. Mr. Craven has a wonderful touch, and there is no reason why, like Stanfield, he should not use it for cabinet pictures. When it is considered that there were twenty-two scenes, and that most of these were "sets," it was amazing with what rapidity and smoothness the changes were contrived. The secret, of course, was in the vast forces employed behind, under Loveday's generalship. The dresses, too, designed by Mr. Alfred Thompson, were lovely, all the

new and exquisite colours—"dead leaf"—and the rich cut velvets, which look so effective on the stage—being profusely employed. The artist had also called in aid the old gold yellows of the Venetian painters; the patches of crimson, or lake, used in skull-caps, or cuffs; the superb satins; the whole, indeed, had the effect as though Paul Veronese had been imitated, and suggested the famous feast in the Louvre. One of the justest remarks made in the many criticisms of the piece was that the disposer of the lights was as artistic in his way as the rest; for the silvery rays of the moon on tree and leaves, as well as the break of day, with varied combinations, were displayed with consummate taste and art. There were curtains by Hann, of a lovely Venetian tapestry pattern, while the rich folds of the crimson velvet curtain hung from above. Irving was the inspirer of all—his touch or suggestion was evident everywhere. Not the least pleasurable part of the whole was the romantic music, written in a flowing, tender strain by Sir Julius Benedict, full of a juvenile freedom and spirit, thoroughly Italian in character, and having something of the grace and character of Schubert's *Rosamunde*. In the scenery—and it is hard to get away from this fascinating topic—there were some difficulties solved in the true Shakespearian spirit. In the exquisite garden, with its depth of silvered trees glistening in the moonlight, viewed from a terrace, the arrangement of the balcony was the only successful solution seen as yet. It has always been forgotten that Juliet has to act—is, as it were, "on the

stage"—and should not be perched in a little wobbling cage. Here it was made a sort of solid loggia, as much a part of the stage as that upon which her lover was standing. I fancy this was the scenic triumph of the night. Much praise has been given to Juliet's chamber, which seemed almost too gorgeous and glittering. The monumental, massive character of some of the street scenes was remarkable—and one, in which the duel with Tybalt took place, recalled Alma Tadema and his circular marble benches.

When it is considered that Romeo and Juliet are characters almost impossible to perform, so as to reach the Shakespearian ideal, it becomes easier to "liberate one's mind" on the subject of the performance of the two leading characters. At the beginning of the night, Irving's face seemed older than the character warranted, owing mainly to the marked character of his features, and, what is beyond doubt, to the little crimson skull-cap, whose excessive colour robbed his cheeks of theirs. Afterwards, when he laid it aside, he looked far better. Romeo, it may be conceived, excited most speculation. It was like all he does—marked with exceeding thought, culture, and refinement; though no doubt it did not satisfy all.

Irving's and Miss Terry's delineation of the two leading characters excited much discussion. The chief objection was that they scarcely presented the ideal of superabundant youth—boyish and girlish—required by the play. I have always thought this a point to be but little insisted upon; it is much the same as with

strictness of costume, which is overpowered, as it were, by the acting, It is the *acting* of youth, not the appearance of youth, that is required; and a case is conceivable that all the flush of youth with its physical accompaniments may be present in perfection, and yet from failure of the acting the idea of maturity and age might be conveyed.¹ In the dramatic ball-room scene, when he was moving about arrayed as a pilgrim, the unbecoming dress and rather too swarthy features seemed to convey the presentment of a person in the prime of life. The critics spoke freely in this sense.

In the latter, more tragic portion of the play, the very intensity of the emotion seemed to add maturity

¹ Mr. Labouchere, a shrewd observer, a friend and admirer of the actor's abilities, always speaks out his opinions in plain, blunt terms: "An actor must, in order to win popularity, have mannerisms, and the more peculiar they are, the greater will be his popularity. No one can for a moment suppose that Mr. Irving could not speak distinctly, progress about the stage after the fashion of human beings, and stand still without balancing to and fro like a bear in a cage, if he pleased. Yet had he not done all this, he would— notwithstanding that there is a touch of real genius about his acting sometimes—never have made the mark that he has. *He is, indeed, to the stage what Lord Beaconsfield was to politics.* That exceedingly able man never could utter the resonant clap-trap in which he so often indulged, and which made men talk about him, without almost showing by his manner that he himself despised the tricks which gave him individuality. Were Mr. Irving at present to abate his peculiarities, his fervent worshippers would complain that their idol was sinking into mere commonplace. Therefore, as I sincerely hope that, for his sake, the idolaters will continue to bow down before him and fill his treasury, I trust that he will never change." There is a cynical flavour in this, and not very flattering to the audience, but underlying it there is some truth.

and depth to the character of Romeo. Nothing could better supply the notion of impending destiny, of gathering gloom, than the view of the dismal heart-chilling street, the scene of the visit to the apothecary. Our actor's picturesque sense was shown in his almost perfect conception of this situation. The forlorn look of the houses, the general desolation, the stormy grandeur in keeping with the surroundings, the properly subdued grotesqueness of the seller of simples (it was the grotesqueness of *misery* that was conveyed), filled the heart with a sadness that was almost real.

In Miss Terry's case there was a division of opinions, some thinking her performance all but perfect, others noting the absence of "girlishness." All agreed as to its engaging character and its winning charm.

Terriss was the Mercutio, which he gave with his favourite blunt impetuosity. But one of the most perfectly played characters was Mrs. Stirling's Nurse. This accomplished woman represented all the best traditions—high training, admirable elocution, with the art of giving due weight and breadth to every utterance. And yet here was a curious phenomenon. The very excellence of the delineation disturbed the balance of the play. The Nurse became almost as important as the leading performers, but not from any fault of the actress. She but followed the due course. This is a blemish which is found in many exhibitions of Shakespearian plays, where the inferior

actor works up his Dogberry, or his Grave-digger, or his Jacques to the very fullest extent of which they are capable. But there should be subordination: these are merely humours exhibited *en passant*. With an actress of Mrs. Stirling's powers and rank, the manager no doubt felt too much delicacy to interfere; nor would perhaps the audience have placidly accepted any effacing of her part. But as it was, the figure of this humble retainer became unduly prominent.¹

'Romeo and Juliet' was witnessed one night by the impetuous Sarah Bernhardt, who afterwards came behind the scenes to congratulate the performers. "How can you act in this way every night?" she exclaimed to Ellen Terry. The latter, in her simple, natural way explained: "It is the audience—they inspire me!"

Such was this refined, elegant, and truly brilliant spectacle, which as usual furnished "talk for the town" and stirred its interest. The hundredth night of performance was celebrated by a banquet on the stage of one Sunday night, June 25, 1882. Here assembled critics, dramatists, artists, *e tutti quanti*; there were many admirers, friends, and sympathizers present, some of whom have since passed away—Sir W. Hardman, Dr. Cox, Blanchard, Palgrave Simpson, and Lord Lytton. There is a sadness in thinking of these disappearances.

¹ An article from a Liverpool critic, Mr. Russell, had appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*, which indeed was somewhat indiscriminating in its praises of the Lyceum 'Romeo and Juliet.'

Among the guests at the banquet was Mr. Abbey, the American manager, well known for his many daring and very successful *coups* in management. In the course of the night there were some rumours circulated as to the motives of his presence in town ; but an *illusion* in Irving's speech, when he said pointedly that he hoped next year to have good experience of the cordiality of American audiences, set the matter at rest. This scheme had long been in his thoughts : and indeed many invitations and proposals had already been made to him to visit the United States. There was something dazzling and fascinating in this prospect of going forth to conquer a new great kingdom and new audiences. There was the chance, too, of riches "beyond the dreams of avarice." No wonder, then, that the scheme began to take shape and was presently to be decided upon.

The late Earl of Lytton was a guest on this occasion. This cultured man, who had filled and was to fill some of the highest offices, delivered a speech, in which he indicated the methods of the active manager very happily ; though some of his theories—such as that modern scenery had the same function as the ancient Greek Chorus—seemed rather fantastical.

After one hundred and thirty nights' performance of 'Romeo and Juliet,' the season was brought to a close, the manager taking "a benefit" on his last night. Some ungracious folk object to this old-established form of compliment, but he defended it in a very modest and judicious way.

CHAPTER XIII.

1882.

'MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING'—AMERICAN VISIT
ARRANGED.

IN his speech at the close of the season, the manager announced the new piece selected for the next season. With that judicious view to contrast or relief, which directed all his efforts, he had settled on a true comedy, the effective 'Much Ado About Nothing.' To this piece many had long since pointed as being exactly adapted to the special gifts of the two performers. Not so happily contrasted, however, was it in its scenery and decorations; for here was the fourth Shakespearian play of an Italian complexion and atmosphere, which entailed accordingly a fresh exhibition of Italian streets, manners, and costumes. A happy impression was produced by the very note of preparation, the air was filled with the breath of the coming piece; all felt, in anticipation, the agreeable humours and fancies of Benedick and his Beatrice. This feeling of comedy, it may be said, is ever a delightful one; it spreads abroad a placid, quiet enjoyment and good-humour with which nothing else can compare.

On Wednesday, October 11, 1882, the delightful piece was brought out. From the excellent acting of the two principal performers, and the beautiful "setting" of the whole, it was destined to become one of the most popular and acceptable of the Lyceum *répertoire*. By a curious delusion, owing no doubt to the recollection of the lavish splendours of 'Romeo and Juliet,' some critics pronounced that it had been brought out with but a moderate display of scenic resources. The truth was that the play had been "mounted" with as much state as it would properly bear.¹ Some scenes were equipped in an unusually lavish and superb style. The general effect, however, was harmonious; indeed the happy tact of the manager was never displayed to such advantage as in seizing on what might be termed the proper key of the piece. When we recall, with a pleasant enjoyment, these various Lyceum spectacles, we find that there is no confusion of one with the other, that each has a special,

¹ This loading a piece beyond what it is likely to bear is the failing of the ignorant manager. He will "mount," dress, adorn *quand même*; even more intelligent directors can hardly resist the temptation to make the most of a situation, so as to make a sensation which is only of trivial moment as regards the interest of the plot. Thus Messenger's beautiful opera 'La Basoche' was lately brought out at our New English Opera in the most sumptuous style, with grand choruses, grand scenery, dresses, etc.—it was said, to the astonishment and delight of the author. But this Tarpeian compliment seemed to have its Nemesis. The piece was a delicate one and full of delicate effects; it had been written for one of the small Paris theatres, where it was produced in a modest manner, the author relying on his music and scenery. The frail fabric was too insubstantial to support Grand Opera treatment. We can apply this little lesson for ourselves.

distinct note, and thus is started a train of impressions, delightful for their variety, and which enrich the chambers of the memory.

There was one scene which, for its splendour and originality, was to be talked of for many a day, viz. the beautiful interior of a church at Messina—the "Church scene" as it was called. The art displayed here, the combination of "built-up" scenery with "cloths," the rich harmonious tintings, the ecclesiastical details, the metal-work, altars, etc., made an exquisite picture.¹ The well-known passage of the interrupted bridal was "laid out" with extraordinary picturesqueness, much emphasis being given to the religious rites. It was felt, however, that the genuflections before the altar was introducing rather too awful a suggestion, though the intention was, no doubt, reverent. It must be admitted by all whose memories wander back to that performance, that the vision of this "Church scene" rises before them with an almost pathetic significance, owing in some part to the touching, sympathetic acting of Miss Millward. By this emphasizing of the state and publicity of the scene, the crowds and rich dresses and ecclesiastical robes, the "distressful" character of such a trial for a young bride was brought out in a very striking way.

This, however, re-opens the interesting question of the interpretation of the Shakespearian stage directions,

¹ Mr. Forbes Robertson, who is painter as well as actor, depicted this striking scene on canvas, giving portraits of the performers. It has been engraved (or rather "processed") with very happy result.

which in this case are general and meagre enough. On the one side it may be urged that all that is decided is the action of a marriage to be celebrated by a Friar ; there are a few friends ; there is no word of a church ; it might be in the sacristy, or in the porch. The mighty author, indeed, rising above the limit of particulars, disdained to say more than that a lady had come to be married, and was rejected by the bridegroom ; to be naturally followed by a display of earnest grief and consternation among her friends. These are ordinary phenomena that might occur any day, and the sequence is as natural. The situation is indeed above particulars of church or no church, which are but accidents, and not of the essence. It may then be asked, is not the person who has to set these generalities on the stage entitled to adapt them—to, as it were, translate them into the concrete forms of ordinary life ? Thus, as these were persons of rank, and a prince was present, would not a marriage be celebrated with all state and ceremonial, or could the full dramatic significance be conveyed without these adjuncts ? Would such not be the legitimate development ? Against this there is the serious difficulty of Benedick's and Beatrice's rallying conversation taking place in the very sanctuary, in front of the high altar, which seems discordant ; though, as we *read* the play, there seems to be nothing out of keeping. In proportion, then, as the impressiveness and religious character of the scene is emphasized or intensified, in the same proportion the shock or dis-

cordance is increased. We might take refuge in the device of presenting merely a purlieu or approach to the interior of the Cathedral. This would be only a makeshift; though there might be a compromise of some sort, a side aisle near the door, with a view of the choir in the distance. There is really only a choice of difficulties, and the only solution is either to do as our manager has done—go on with bold consistence, for the elaboration and embroidery of the play, or else treat all with an ascetical strictness according to what I believe are the true laws of scenic effect.

There were plenty of masques, dances, processions, etc., as the bill set forth. And here again the question of "Shakespearian Evolution" irresistibly suggests itself. Should masques, processions, and other adornments be introduced, on the ground that they are likely to be so introduced in such situations in the Bard's day? Are such "shows" and crowds "of the essence"?

All eyes, as it may be conceived, were drawn to the figures of Benedick and Beatrice, as portrayed by Irving and Ellen Terry. Their scenes were followed with a delighted interest, and their gay encounters of wit and flirtation gave unalloyed pleasure. Irving threw a Malvolian gravity over the character, alternated by a certain jocoseness.

These two characters, Benedick and Beatrice, are so much the heritage of all lovers of true comedy, that every one seems to have fixed a standard for himself, which he will critically apply to every representation.

This partiality does not make us particularly *exigent*, but we have each our own fancies. There is nothing more interesting, entertaining, or fruitful in speculation than the discussion of how favourite characters in comedy should be represented. It is as though they were figures in real life. For myself, I confess I would have preferred that the actor had taken the character into still higher realms of airy comedy, and had less emphasized the somewhat farcical passages—such as his lively, rueful, half-comic bearing, after the little stratagem, played upon him by his friends, had worked its effect. Benedick was a man of capacity, a soldier, a gentleman, and though he was likely to be so imposed upon, he would not have given his friends the satisfaction of seeing him in this dejected condition, almost inviting laughter and rude “rallying.”¹

¹ It was an unusual tribute to the interest excited in every direction by the actor's personality, that in the December of this year the lady students at University College should have chosen him for the subject of a formal debate, under the presidency of the clever Mrs. Fawcett. The thesis set down was, “That Henry Irving has, by his dramatic genius, earned his place as foremost among living actors,” and the discussion was begun with much spirit and fluency by Miss Rees, who proceeded to give an analysis of his Hamlet and other characters, contending that his extraordinary *success* was a proof of his merit. The opposition was led by Mrs. Brooksbanks, who fairly and unsparingly attacked the actor for his mannerisms and various defects. Success was no test of merit. What she asked was “that mysterious mixture,” the taste of the British public, which had found it impossible to tear itself away from ‘Our Boys’ and ‘Drink.’ Irving, she admitted, possessed a certain talent, but it was not the talent of art. An actor ought to be able to stand, walk, move quietly, speak, declaim, and give some appearance of spontaneous movement. “This is required from any ordinary human being.” Instead of

During all this time, preparations for the great American visit were being carefully matured. There is supposed to be a sort of hostility between artistic gifts and business-like habits; but Irving has always shown great capacity where organization and arrangement are in question—he has the clearest vision, and a firm, decided purpose. In this he has often suggested a surprising likeness to the departed novelist, Dickens, who was also remarkable for his business power and decision of character, and whose motto it was to do every trifle even in the best way that it could be done. Anything worth doing, was worth doing well. It is no doubt from some such instinct that genius has been defined as “the power of taking pains,” and art itself, devoid of order and purpose, may after all prove to be but very imperfect art.

Nothing was left undone to ensure success. Everything was “thought out” beforehand with the greatest care and deliberation. The American manager, Abbey, who had undertaken the direction of the venture, and had a vast store of experience and skill at command, of course planned the arrangements of the visit;

standing Irving fidgets; instead of moving quickly he gives portentous strides; instead of speaking he makes unintelligible sounds, etc. A friend asked her one night in what language he was speaking, Greek or Hebrew? “No,” answered the lady sarcastically, “it is Irving’s English; but unless one knows his plays word for word, one is apt to get confused.” But she was not inclined to lay much stress on these physical blemishes. His conceptions were wrong. After a reply from Miss Rees, the original motion was put to the ladies, and was carried by a slender majority. The actor must have read these proceedings, which were flattering enough, with much enjoyment.

but the purely theatrical details were thrown upon the English actor, who had to equip completely some dozen plays with scenery, dresses, and properties. A following of from seventy to a hundred persons—that included actors, actresses, secretaries, scenic and music artists, dressers, supernumeraries—was to be taken out.¹ Further, with a view to making the company thoroughly familiar with the *répertoire*, for months beforehand a sort of continuous rehearsal went on before the regular Lyceum audiences; that is, all the stock-pieces were revived one after the other, and performed with much care.

The honours and flattering tributes that were now lavished on the departing actor would have turned the head of one less sensible or less unspoiled. The town seemed really to have “run horn mad” after him, and could talk of nothing but of him and his expedition. As was to be expected, the compliment of a public dinner was the smallest of these tributes. Presents and invitations were lavished upon him. In a caricature he was shown as being profusely anointed, by critics and others, from a tub filled with a composition labelled “butter.” In another the Prince of Wales is obsequiously presenting an invitation, which the actor excuses himself from accepting owing to “my many

¹ An idea of what a “tremendous” business this was may be gathered from a single detail. A well-known, experienced wig-maker from Covent Garden, with two assistants, was engaged to look after the *coiffures* of the company, and these “artists in hair” had under their charge a collection of wigs, entirely new, no fewer than eleven hundred in number!

engagements." The most famous portrait-painter of the day begged to be allowed to paint his picture, which he wished to offer as a present to the Garrick Club.¹ Rumours were busily circulated—and contradicted—that a knighthood had been offered and declined.

The public dinner at St. James's Hall was fixed for July 4—a compliment to the American people. The list of stewards was truly extraordinary, comprising almost every one of mark in the arts and the great professions. The Chief Justice, Lord Coleridge, who was himself setting out for a tour in the States, was to take the chair. Mr. Gladstone and some Cabinet Ministers were on the committee. There were three thousand applicants for the five hundred possible seats, all that Mr. Pinches, the secretary—a relation of the actor's old master—could contrive to supply. Two Bishops excused their attendance in flattering terms; and Mr. Gladstone would gladly have attended, but was compelled by his duties as Prime Minister to be absent.² At this banquet, besides the Chief Justice

¹ Where it now hangs over the chimney-piece in the Guests' Room. It is not so successful as many others of Millais' works: is rather sketchily painted, and lacking in breadth, force, and expression. The late Mr. Long painted the actor as Hamlet and Richard III. These are not very striking performances, but they are refined and interesting portraits. Mr. Whistler produced an extraordinary portrait of him as Philip II., strangely "shadowy" and indistinct, of preternatural length. A number of artists of less pretensions have also essayed to limn the actor. But all have failed to sketch the mobile, delicate expression of the lips. Boldly daring, I myself have fashioned a bust of him in terra-cotta.

² It is said that the origin of the acquaintance between Irving and this statesman was an accidental encounter in the street, when the

and the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, there were five other judges present, together with all that was distinguished in the professions and arts.

The Chairman, in a thoughtful and studied speech, delivered perhaps one of the best *apologias* for the actor that is ever likely to be offered. The skill and moderation of the accomplished advocate was shown to perfection: he did not adulate, but gave the actor a graduated and judicious measure of praise for all he had done in the improvement in the general tone, morals, and methods of the stage.

Irving acknowledged these compliments in grateful and heartfelt terms, addressed not so much to the diners present as to the kingdom in general.

After these metropolitan honours, he passed to Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Liverpool. At each city he was greeted with complimentary banquets. At Edinburgh he opened a new theatre, named in compliment to his own, the Lyceum. He was invited to Hawarden by Mr. Gladstone, and also to Knowsley, on a visit to Lord Derby.

On October 10, 1883, the chief members of the company—over forty in number—sailed for New York, under the conduct of Mr. Bram Stoker. Tons of scenery, dresses, properties, etc., had been already shipped. The following day Irving and Miss Terry

latter, with a sympathetic impulsiveness, stopped Irving and introduced himself. He has since been an assiduous frequenter of the Lyceum, and in his eighty-third year was seen in the stalls, following the scenes of 'Henry VIII.' with unabated interest.

embarked on board the White Star liner, *The Britannic*. Up to the last moment telegrams and letters containing good wishes literally by hundreds were being brought in. Even while the vessel was detained at Queens-town, the Mayor and Corporation of Cork seized the opportunity of saluting him with a parting address. The incidents have been all described by my friend Mr. Joseph Hatton, who attended the party as "historiographer"; and I may refer the reader to his interesting volumes.

The visit was to prove one long triumph, and the six months' progress a strange, wonderful phantasmagoria of receptions, entertainments, hospitalities of all kinds. Novel and original, too, were the humours and fashions that greeted them everywhere, and the eyes of the two players must have often turned back with pleasure to that odd pantomime.

'The Bells' was selected for the opening performance, which was on October 29, 1883. Though his reception was overpowering and tumultuous, there was some hesitation as to the success of the play itself, and the critics seemed to be a little doubtful as to whether it fairly represented the full measure of his gifts. But when 'Louis XI.' and 'Much Ado About Nothing' were presented, all doubts vanished. Miss Terry won all hearts; her sympathetic style and winsome ways made conquest of every audience. Nothing struck the Americans with such astonishment as the exquisite arrangement and "stage management" of the Shakespearian comedy, the reserved yet effectively harmonious

treatment of all the details being a complete revelation. The actor's consummate taste was recognized; in fact, the result of the visit was a complete revolution in all the American stage methods. The extraordinary record of lavish hospitalities, tributes of all kinds, with the adventures, are set forth fully in the story of the tour. But it is only by consulting the American journals that we can gather a notion of the odd "humours," often grotesque, by which the American public displays its enthusiastic approbation.¹ The "interviewers," as may be imagined, were rampant, and extracted from the genial and courteous actor opinions on everything connected with his profession. One of the most fantastic notions was the collecting the opinions of all the leading performers, which were printed at length.²

¹ These newspapers were sent to me without interruption through the whole tour by Irving's direction.

² A description of a "first-night" at the Clement Street Opera House is worth quoting here:—

"Ladies took their place in line and waited for hours to get tickets for the opening performance. The face of the tall and genial Bram Stoker, Mr. Irving's agent, wore a broad smile as, standing in the vestibule, he noticed the swelling crowd passing between the continually swinging doors. The array of regular first-nighters was up to the notch, and all the familiar faces, not only those most looked for with the lorgnettes, but those that vanish between the acts, were there. After the first act the vestibule was full, and there was a scene of hand-shaking and button-holing and fraternal comparison of views that were worth watching in itself. Tall Tom Donaldson, one of Blaine's lieutenants, whose wife and daughter were in one of the boxes, was leaning against the wall talking to Judge William Haydon, formerly of Nevada, one of the oldest theatre-goers in the United States, who saw Edmund Kean play Hamlet and thinks Irving the

The party remained in the country until the May of the year following. The receipts exceeded every forecast, a quarter of a million dollars having been

best actor he has seen since. Joseph F. Tobias, ruddy, genial, and Chesterfieldian as ever, was shaking hands at every turn, and L. Clark Davis, in immaculate evening dress and pearl studs, but with the inevitable Bohemian hat, was the centre of a chatty group. Charles E. Cramp and Horace Warding were talking to Dr. Thomas H. Andrews, who has the largest theatrical practice of any physician in Philadelphia, and has been called to attend half the stars who have appeared here in recent years. Almost every well-known first-nighter was on hand, and the invariable sentiment was that this was the big event of the present year. The appearance of the parquet and circle was delightful. Such a collection of new and stunning bonnets and such an array of lovely faces in them has not been seen in the Opera House for a long time. Most of the social leaders, the matrons with be vies of belles in charge, were there, and the array of parties who came together with a chaperon after dining before starting was particularly large. There were many well-known people who are not often seen at the theatre, notably Daniel M. Fox, Director of the Mint, who sat in the centre aisle, near the stage, with a party of friends, and appeared to enjoy the performance very much. Just back of him was a large party from Bethlehem, Pa. John R. Jones, the Bible publisher, had with him Miss Jones, in a stunning grey imported costume, one of the most artistic in the theatre. Robert W. Downing had quite a party. There were several large theatrical parties. The most noticeable was the one given by Miss K. N. Green, which included many attractive ladies. Ex-Attorney-General Brewster was the centre of quite a large party in the orchestra, including several ladies. A very beautiful bevy was the party given by Miss Hattie Fox, daughter of George S. Fox, which numbered thirty-five. They all had seats in the orchestra circle. Some of the most fashionable people had to be content with seats up-stairs, and there was one party of young ladies in the family circle who were in full dress and went direct in carriages at the close of the performance to the dancing class. Altogether, such a notable and brilliant first-night audience has not been seen in the Opera House for many years."

taken in the first four weeks. But the expenses were enormous. The substantial profit was found in Irving's securing a new, vast, and prominent audience in the West; in his winning the suffrages of Americans abroad as well as of those at home, who became his most fervent adherents. A second American expedition followed in the September of the same year, during which a visit was paid to Canada.

CHAPTER XIV.

1884.

‘TWELFTH NIGHT’—‘THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD’

—OXFORD HONOURS.

ON July 8, 1884, a few weeks after the return to London, ‘Twelfth Night’ was brought out at the Lyceum, and, for luxury of scenery, dresses, and mounting, fully equalled all its predecessors. Irving was, of course, the Malvolio, which he rendered not exactly after Charles Lamb’s interpretation, but, indeed, as any one of Shakespearian intelligence would have done, never lapsing into farce, but treating the whole earnestly. It was a beautiful and graceful show, full of alternate sympathy and humour. Personally we look back to it as one of the most welcome and interesting of his revivals; all the incidents connected with Viola, so charmingly interpreted by Ellen Terry, have an irresistible and touching interest. The scenery was costly and exquisite, and reflected the tone of the piece. The audience, however, listened with a somewhat languid interest—some said because of the oppressive heat of a July night, which fretted and put them out of humour; but, I

believe, because they were unfamiliar with the piece, and had not been "educated up to it." When the manager came out at the close, with all the good-humour and freedom of a privileged favourite, he was confounded to find his expressions of self-congratulation and satisfaction greeted with uncouth denial and rude interruptions. This extraordinary state of things, hitherto unknown or undreamt of at the Lyceum, somewhat shocked the audience. He was not accustomed to such coarse reception, and with much spirit he administered this well-deserved chastisement: "I can't understand how a company of earnest comedians and admirable actors, having these three cardinal virtues of actors—being sober, clean, and perfect—and having exercised their abilities on one of the most difficult plays, can have given any cause for dissatisfaction." This displeased the malcontents, whose complaint it was difficult to understand; for it was an elegant, graceful, painstaking performance, such as any intellectual person would have delighted in, and have followed to the end with interest. But there are curious idiosyncrasies in audiences, one of which is, as I have noted, that they must be in some way familiar with the piece and its incidents; and there must be broad, comprehensive types of character. Now Malvolio, one of the most delicately exquisite of conceptions, it could be seen, was almost unintelligible to "the general": they took him for some "crank," or half-cracked being, appearing in his night-cap, etc. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew and their rollickings were

actually thought "low" or vulgar, on the same principle that Tony Lumpkin's ale-house friend could not abide anything low. Such humours were resented. So much for the ignorant, ill-mannered section of the audience.

It was argued indeed by critics that Irving's Malvolio was somewhat *too* much in earnest, and therefore was liable to be accepted by the audience as a serious person, actually in love with his mistress, which with his eccentricities and oddities became an impertinence. Whereas, as Lamb says, by imparting a quaint humorousness, the audience sees the absurdity of the jest and is amused. Elia, indeed, always insists that the actor of such "fantastical" parts should hint to the audience, slyly as it were, that he is only half in earnest.

It might be said, too, that the piece was somewhat overlaid with scenery, and too weak and airy for such a burden. A lovely scene, for instance, was the opening one, displaying the sea-shore and the red sunset, a vast "set" embracing a goodly portion of the stage; yet this was merely to introduce Viola, who had been set on shore, the whole incident being trivial and unimportant, and not lasting more than two or three minutes. The audience in such cases always feel that the end is too trifling for the means.

A most delightful sense of pure natural comedy was induced by the likeness between the Terrys, brother and sister, who had a sort of Shakespearian elegance in their bearing. But this did not avail

much with the uncultured crowd. It was objected also that the play was set forth somewhat pedantically and too much *au grand sérieux*, many of the actors, not being comedians—witness Mr. Terriss—imparting a literal tone to all they said and did. This was not without its effect on the audience, who by the very promise of seriousness were beguiled into expecting something serious. Irving himself was not wholly free from this method; and in the strange scene of the imprisonment, so difficult to “carry off,” he was deeply tragic, as if really suffering and without any underlying grotesqueness. His exit, too, with solemn menaces had the air of retributive punishment in store.

Now followed a second expedition to the States, as well as to Canada, the details of which I pass over. On the re-opening of his theatre on his return a rather disagreeable episode occurred, connected with an alteration he had made in the arrangement of his house. It was announced that places in the pit might be reserved and secured in advance, which gave rise to indignant protest and to cries of “Give us back our Pit.” The question was warmly discussed in the newspapers.

The advantage of the debate was that it clearly established a true theatrical principle—viz. that the pit and galleries are intended for the crowd, and should be free and open to the “man in the street”: that the best seats must be the prize of the strongest and most patient. The principle of numbering and booking, it was shown, would actually abolish the pit; just as it has

been found that any improvement in the dwellings, clothes, etc. of the lower classes does not raise those of the lower *couche sociale*, but is taken advantage of by those above. The removal of all inconveniences connected with the pit would only recommend it to the tenants of the boxes and balconies, who would find below for two shillings a place almost as good as those above they had enjoyed for three or four. The regular Pittite is not provident, and disdains being *compelled* to go early, which he would be had he secured his place beforehand: he would thus be driven out altogether. Another unexpected result would assuredly follow—viz. a rise in the prices, as the secured front rows are excellent places, and scarcely distinguishable from the last rows of the stalls. This principle is recognized in the French houses, where the *stalles d'orchestre*, which come next to the *fauteuils d'orchestre*,¹ and are merely the front rows of the pit, are charged for on a higher scale. The judicious manager understood and recognized the public discontent, and made announcement that, on May 18, he would restore the old custom.

In accordance with his engagement, the manager now proceeded to get ready Wills's pleasing and sympathetic drama, 'Olivia.' This was no doubt selected with a view to furnishing a fresh opportunity for the display of Miss Terry's attractions; but it will be seen that she was not to be altogether the cynosure of the

¹ This word for a time came into use in English theatres, but has disappeared. I recollect being asked by one obliging business-manager, would I like "two capital *Fortools*"?

whole, and that two other accomplished performers were to share the honours of the piece. It was produced on May 27, 1885, and excited much interest.

This creation of Dr. Primrose has always seemed to be one of the most interesting and most original of Irving's characters. It is elaborated and finished to the very highest point, and yet there is no lack of simplicity or unaffected grace. The character suited him in every way, and seemed to hold completely in check all his little "mannerisms," as they were called. There was a sort of Meissonier delicacy in his touches, and scarcely any other of his characters is so filled in and rounded with unspoken acting—that is, by the play of facial expression, gesture, walk, etc. It was indeed a delightful performance, and always holds the audience, which follows the amiable Vicar's successive emotions. These the actor allows unconsciously, as it were, to escape him, as he pursues his little domestic course unconscious of spectators.

One reason for this complete success was, of course, that Irving, like so many others, had read, known, and felt this engaging character from his childhood, altogether outside dramatic conditions, though of course it is not every play that enjoys this advantage.

It should be added that the piece had been somewhat altered from its first shape, and no doubt gained from the manager's suggestions. One of the most astonishing things connected with it is the admirably firm and coherent construction, it being laid out in the most effective way. Its various characters are introduced

with singular skill. The last act seemed indeed somewhat superfluous and too much drawn out; but the whole design was really admirable. Yet its adapter was admittedly deficient in the arts of construction, and most of his other pieces display singular and even ludicrous incoherencies. It might be that he had received assistance in this individual case, or had been so inspired by the subject as to triumph over his own defects.

As we look back to the Lyceum, the eye rests with infinite pleasure on this engaging figure of the Vicar, with his powdered wig and rusted suit, and that amiable smile of simplicity which betokened what agreeable fancies were occupying his mind. The centre of a happy family, content with the happiness of his wife and children, no picture could have been prettier. With an exquisite feeling of propriety, the quaint, antique associations were developed, and no more pleasing scene could have been conceived, or one that lingers more in the memory, than the scene at night, when the family are singing at the spinet, Moses accompanying with his flute,¹ the Vicar in his chair, the cuckoo-clock in the corner. It was a fine instinct that directed these things.

Such tales as these—world-wide stories that belong

¹ When the piece was first given at the Court Theatre, there was a bit of realism that was conscientious. The little family music was accompanied on a genuine old harpsichord, which, it was gravely announced in the bill, was actually dated 1768, about the period of the novel, and was, of course, "kindly lent" by the owner.

to all countries and to all time—Shakespearian in short, seem on repetition to have the air of novelty ; at least, they always interest. The situations are dramatic, and the characters even more dramatic than the situations. Miss Terry's Olivia is not only one of her best characters, but is a most touchingly graceful and varied performance. The gifted pair are indeed seen at their best here. In the excellently-contrived scene at the Dragon, Miss Terry's transition of horror, astonishment, rage, shame, succeeding each other, were displayed with extraordinary force and variety. Some insisted that the part suffered from her restlessness, but, as it was happily said, "She is for ever flickering about the stage in a series of *poses*, or rather disturbance of *pose*, each in itself so charming that one can hardly account for the distrust she herself shows of it by instantly changing it for another." The other characters were no less excellent in their way. Terriss, as the Squire, was admirably suited, his very defect—an excessively pronounced brusqueness—adding to the effect. I recollect it was said at the time in the theatre that there was only the one performer for Thornhill, and that Terriss—and he only—must be secured. He never performed so well as in this character.

A year later there occurred what must have been one of the most gratifying incidents in the actor's career, and one of the most pleasant to recall. The Oxford commencements, held on June 26, 1886, were more than usually brilliant. At that time, the

learned and popular Dr. Jowett was Vice-Chancellor, a man, as is well known, of the largest sympathies. Though a divine, he took a deep interest in Irving and his profession. On its being proposed to confer honorary degrees on certain distinguished guests, including Mr. John Bright, the Vice-Chancellor, it is said, suggested the name of the well-known actor. There was something, as I say, dramatic or characteristic in this proposal, coming as it did from so expressive a personality. The University, however, was not prepared to go so far as this; though the proposal was only negatived, it is said, by a narrow majority of two votes. The vigorous purpose of the Vice-Chancellor was not to be thus baffled, and by a brilliant *coup* he contrived that the very omission of the actor's name—like the absence of one portrait from a series—should suggest that the chief performer had been "left" out, and thus supplied a fresh element in the brilliancy of his reception. He invited him to deliver a lecture on his art in the very precincts of the University, and under the patronage of its most distinguished professors and "Heads," and it may be conceived that the figure of the popular player became the cynosure of attraction in the brilliant academic show.

"For when the well-grac'd actor quits the scene,
The eyes of men are idly bent on him that enters next."

Of this characteristic incident the editor of *Truth*, that free-lance, wrote in his own pleasantly fantastic style: "But the Master of Balliol is not the kind of

man to be daunted by a temporary rebuff. For the moment, the Sheldonian Theatre might be refused to the actor by the authorities ; but the New Schools in the High Street were open to the Vice-Chancellor, and thither he escorted Irving the actor with flourish of trumpets. Never was a thing so successfully managed ; never was triumph more complete. Two Liberals and Gladstonites, Lord and Lady Dalhousie, were invited to stay at Balliol with the Master to meet Irving. A Gladstonite Bishop, Boyd Carpenter, of Ripon, was asked to preach the sermon that ushered the Commemoration, and to join the art party at the Master's house. The Bishop, who was to preach on Moses at St. Mary's, was regaled with anecdotes of Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, and Kean over-night. The ladies ogled the celebrated actor, implored him for his autograph, and flung their birthday-books at his feet. The Oxford boys—amateurs, athletes and all—cheered him to the echo, and presented him with illuminated vellum and bound copies of Shakespeare ; but the last triumph of the evening was reserved for the keen-witted and perceptive Jowett. He had inveigled to the New Schools at Oxford all the avowed enemies of the dramatic scheme and the new-fangled artistic hero-worship. The Dean of Christ Church and Mrs. Liddell condescended to come. Grave proctors took the chairs by the side of the Vice-Chancellor, who, directly the lecture was over, surprised every one by getting up and supplementing it with a discourse of his own. He was determined to have his say about

the drama, and he had it. There was no getting out of it. They might refuse Irving his degree and his gown, but Jowett's defence of the drama was inevitable. This done the Master of Balliol scored point upon point, over which he must have slyly chuckled. Fancy the fun of marching from Balliol to St. Mary's on Sunday morning, preceded by the grave gentlemen with the silver pokers, and accompanied by a Bishop with a sermon under his arm and an actor with a lecture in his pocket!"

When it became known that the actor was to give his address, every one of note and culture and importance in the place rushed to secure seats. Some fourteen hundred persons were present, with most of "the Heads of Houses," and distinguished professors. Dr. Jowett welcomed him in some warm and well-chosen phrases, telling him how much honoured they felt by his coming to them. A good English actor, he said happily enough, lived in the best company, that of Goethe and Shakespeare; and coming from such, he might seem to convey that he was good enough company for them.

During the past year, 1892, the University of Dublin has been the first to recognize officially the actor's position, and at the celebration of its tercentenary, conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, in company with many distinguished men.

Irving's sympathetic temperament has always been specially acceptable to this University, and the youths of Trinity College from the beginning were eager to

exhibit their appreciation and admiration of his talent. They would attend him home from the theatre in uproarious procession, and sing songs in his praise in the galleries. So early as June 1877 he was induced to give a reading in the University in its great Examination Hall. This was accepted as a sort of educational display. The Provost, the Dean, and other "Dons" all attended. He gave *Richard III.*, a chapter of *David Copperfield*, and *Eugene Aram*. An illuminated address was presented to him, and to make the day truly festive and collegiate, the actor dined in the Hall, the guest of the College, and went his way covered with honours.

Indeed, this friendly cordiality of his reception by the Dublin people and their affectionate admiration for himself, personally, he acknowledged in very kindly fashion. On the last night of one of his engagements he made one of his little speeches. "When I left here last year, I felt as if I were among old friends, so warm and enthusiastic was your valedictory applause. This year I have found that the dream was thoroughly realized, was in truth a sober reality. I have tried to-day to show that I am not ungrateful." He had, in fact, given a reading for the Alexandra Ladies' College, which brought in nearly £200. For another institution, St. Mary's Asylum for the Blind, he promised also to give his services. Such a man was truly after the heart of the Irish.

Later came the turn of Edinburgh, where he was much considered, and in 1881 delivered a lecture

before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute. With pleasure, too, must he look back to his welcome at Harvard University, in the United States. The novelty of the scene, the warm welcome accorded to him in a strange land, must have made a most welcome shape of honour. He delivered a lecture on the "Art of Acting"—his favourite topic—in the great Sande's Theatre, into which over two thousand persons were crowded: the usual audience was sixteen hundred. An enormous crowd blocked the doors, so that the actor on his arrival could not gain admittance, and had to be taken in by a subterranean passage. The president was in a conspicuous place, and all the professors and dons attended. Another American University, that of Cambridge, also invited him to lecture (rather to give instruction) before them, and the newspapers of the country declared that the honours with which he was welcomed were really "unprecedented." Again he discoursed on the "Art of Acting." An even more flattering and unusual compliment was the invitation to the Military Academy at Westpoint, where, with his company, he performed 'The Merchant of Venice' in Elizabethan dresses, but without scenery—to the huge enjoyment of professors and students. This is a round of University distinctions that has never fallen to the lot of any other actor. We may see in it an instinctive recognition of a cultured and artistic feeling that has influenced the community and done excellent educational service.

CHAPTER XV.

1886.

'FAUST.'

IRVING had long wished to display his sardonic power in Goethe's great character of Mephistopheles. He had already given proof of his quality in this line in *Louis XI.* and *Richard III.*; but there was a piquancy and range in Mephistopheles which naturally offered him an attraction, from the mixture of the comic or grotesque with deep tragic force. It also offered room for a superb, and almost unlimited, display of scenic magnificence. The outlines of the story were already familiar enough with the public, owing to the ever-popular opera. This indeed was a drawback; it seemed difficult to depart from the received arrangement of scenes in that most perfect libretto; but the manager was laying out his plan on broader lines, and knew exactly what would attract. It was no secret, too, that in this particular display he was resolved to surpass all his previous efforts.

To Wills was entrusted the work of preparing the adaptation, this writer having, as I said, a command of flowing and melodious versification, which moreover

was fitted to the actor's delivery. The adapter had completed his task many years before, and the piece had long lain in the manager's desk. During this period he let his conception of the piece slowly ripen ; he discussed it with scholars, thought of it ; while the adapter, a German student himself, revised his work at intervals according to the views of his chief. All this was judicious enough. It was destined to be the last work that he was to prepare for his old friend and faithful Lyceum patron. The task was one of enormous difficulty from the gigantic dimensions of the original ; but a model for the abridged plot was furnished by the skilful version translated for Charles Kean and that of the opera, and these were practically followed with a few variations. It must be said that the latest adapter was not altogether well fitted for the task, as he was too much given to descriptions and "recitations," while Mephistopheles might have been made far more of.

The preparations made were of the most thorough kind. For months the manager's rooms were hung round with a profusion of sketches by artists of all kinds ; with relics of Nuremberg and the Goethe country ; with old engravings of Albert Dürer, and great folios of costumes. To permeate himself with something of the tone and feeling of the piece, he travelled in Germany, accompanied by his scene-painter, Mr. Craven. Both stayed at Nuremberg, where the artist contrived to imbue himself with the whole poetry of the old city. Every one of artistic feeling will recall one truly romantic scene—a simple cloth set

very forward on the scene, perhaps to its disadvantage—a view of the old city, with its dull red high roofs and quaintly-peaked spires. Even here, the thoughtful, cultivated instinct of the manager had its part. For, as Mr. Hatton tells us,¹ the first drawing was a prosaic, simple delineation of the town done in realistic fashion; the second an idealization of the first, meant to reflect in a sombre way the situation that was impending. In front there was a sort of rampart or portion of the walls, and a faint red seemed to suffuse all the spreading roofs as though cast by the demon himself. These weird atmospheric effects harmonized with the tone of the play. Such direct inspiration of the manager in every department, which I have before noted, is a guarantee of homogeneousness and true finish.

During the preparations the theatre, now some eighty years old, had been re-decorated afresh, but at the complete sacrifice of the old Vestris adornments, the elegant medallions or cameos, and the double gilt pillars, which were thought to interfere with the view. The outline of the dress-circle was brought forward with some gain of space, and its graceful undulations abolished. For such changes no one can be brought to account—the irresistible pressure of the time and inconvenience brings them about. An entirely new system of decoration was introduced, suggested by that of Raffaele's Loggie at the Vatican, which seemed scarcely sober enough for an auditorium. More

¹ "*À propos* of the Lyceum 'Faust,' " in the *Art Journal*.

structural changes were also made in the interests of the galleries, of which the manager has always shown himself careful.

On December 19, 1886, the piece was produced. There was the now invariable excitement of a Lyceum *première*, and there were stories of frantic efforts, grovellings, implorings, etc., to obtain a seat. A peer had actually been seen in the gallery, and was more than content with his place. The Royal Family were in their box, and the Prince, then in mourning, watched the play from behind the scenes. Mephistopheles was destined for many a night to give the keenest enjoyment to vast audiences. It was indeed a most original conception. With successive performances he enriched it with innumerable telling and grotesque touches; for, as I have said, the adapter had "laid out" the character on rather tame and conventional lines. In spite of all these defects he suggested the notion of "uncanniness" and a supernatural *diablerie*. His antic scaring of the women at the church door will be recalled by many. Miss Terry's Marguerite was full of pathos and poetry, occasionally suggesting, as in the "Jewel" scene, the operatic heroine. But at the first performance it became plain that a serious mistake had been made in the choice of Conway for the hero, Faust. He seemed scarcely to feel or understand the part; there was a lack of passion and sympathy. It was, indeed, an overwhelming burden for a player whose gifts lay in the direction of light comedy.

But on one Saturday night the audience was somewhat astonished to see before them a new Faust, one who, moreover, came on with a book in his hand, which he continued to read aloud even after Mephisto had paid him his visit through the steam clouds. It proved that Conway was suffering from gout; and Alexander, resigning his own character to Tyars, took the rôle of Faust, which on the following night he assumed permanently, and "discharged" in the regular way. Considering the shortness of the notice, he performed this awkward duty *en vrai artiste*—as indeed might be expected.¹ However, the caste was further strengthened by the excellent Mrs. Stirling, whose part was scarcely worthy of her. Placing a strong performer in a part that is inferior to it in strength, instead of improving or fortifying, only further brings out the poverty of the character.

The scenery, dresses, and mounting generally reached a pitch of perfection that had not yet been attempted. Never were supernatural effects, appearances, and lurid figures and visions produced with such an air of probability and with less of magic-lantern or lime-light suggestion.² For the first time the spectators

¹ It is but fair to add that Mr. Conway was suffering from the approach of a serious illness, which declared itself shortly after.

² It was stated that the sum laid out by Irving on 'Faust' was not short of £15,000, but this was a great exaggeration. A peal of bells was specially cast at a charge of £400. This recalls the first Lord Lytton's really witty remark about the directors of the Crystal Palace, that "they seemed determined not to *spoil the ship* for want of a *thousand pounds' worth of tar*."

felt impressed by the sense of the supernatural. Even now there comes back on us the airy visions, the sense of strange communion with the supernatural, alternated with scenes of old-world, rustic life, with the feeling of fate and destiny impending; all which, it might be said, was due to the inspiration of the manager, who has the art of filling other minds with his own poetical views.

In a conversation with an intelligent "interviewer" on his 'Faust,' he explained clearly the limits which he set for himself on the decorating and adorning of a play. These should be subsidiary to the play and to the acting. This all would accept; but, of course, the difficulty lies in interpreting the word subsidiary and settling its extent. "Each scene," he said, "is like his picture to a painter. You have to combine colours, group figures, and arrange the mounting. Contrary to general belief, I am by no means a fanatic of archæology. I would prefer a beautiful anachronism to an ugly reproduction of original costume. The first duty of any one who mounts a piece is to produce a beautiful and pleasing effect. If he can do that with due regard to archæological conditions, well and good; if not, archæology must give place to beauty. No painter would disfigure his canvas by painting a loathsome dress merely because he had seen such a costume. Neither would I introduce an unseemly or ungraceful dress merely because the antiquarians could prove that such was the fashion in the year in which the action of the drama is supposed to take place. Better be out

by a century in your dress than offend the eye of the spectator with a garish colour out of harmony with its surroundings. But with that exception I endeavour to make everything as perfect and as life-like and real as possible. The finest upholstery will not run a piece for a week. It is the acting and the acting alone which enables the piece to occupy the boards. The accusation that my attempt to heighten the picturesque effects of the drama is contrary to the true spirit of our art—is the familiar indictment which has been brought against every actor from Betterton to Garrick, and from Garrick down to our own day, who has endeavoured to make the illusion of the stage as complete as possible. But the only true principle in these matters is that the scenery and the properties should be strictly subordinated to the presentation of the drama. The moment the setting ceases to be the frame, and distracts attention from the picture it encloses, the limit is passed within which the employment of painting, architecture, sculpture, etc., is legitimate.”

In this piece numerous scientific devices were introduced to add to the effect, such as the clouds of steam which veiled the apparition of Mephistopheles, and which was of French origin. This is scarcely illusive, as it is attended by an unmistakable “hissing” sound, as of a locomotive ; it seems what it is, namely steam. The blue electric light flashed with weird effect as the swords of Valentine and Faust crossed. But here again there was an electric wire and “contact,” and a current “switched on.” It may be paradoxical to

say so, but these "advances" in scenic art are really retrograde steps.

Of the regular scenes or structures put on the stage it would be difficult to say too much. The grandly-built porch of the Church of St. Lorentz Platz at Nuremberg, with the buildings grouped round it, were extraordinary works of construction, the porch being "moulded" in all its details, and of the real or natural size.¹

Another scene that lingers in the memory with a sort of twilight melancholy is the garden scene, which again illustrates the admirable instinct of the manager. Red-brick walls of calm, quiet tones, old trees, and above all the sombre towers of the city were seen in the distance. The dresses of the characters were chosen to harmonize, and the deep sunset cast a melancholy glow or tinge over all. The most striking effects were contrived by changes of the lights and "mediums." "The footlights and borders," says Mr. Hatton, "are supplied with artificial sunshine, as with cool shadowed

¹ "One reason," explained the manager to his friend Hatton, "why the Lyceum scenes appear so natural and true, as you say, is that in the foreground everything is life-size. Is it a tree, a wall, a house, or what not, it is life-size, so that the figures in front of it may retain their proper proportions to the scene, and the middle and far distance of the picture have their proper relationship to the whole." A very just principle, but the whole difficulties of scenic effect are therein involved. I have shown elsewhere that "built up" or "constructed" scenery is opposed to the idealism of the stage; even this judicious principle of Mr. Irving's only adds to its "literalness." But for these scenic principles, see my *Art of the Stage* and *Art of Acting*.

yellow brown to greys. There are also silk-cased lights on the flies and limelight lamps in the most unlikely places, so that the crudest colours can be regulated or toned with varied lights." By these contrivances such suggestion as that of a calm, tranquil, and rural innocence and repose can be inspired.

The Brocken scene, for its vastness and ambitious attempt to suggest space and atmosphere, has never been surpassed. Most people were struck by the bewildering crowd of unearthly spirits, witches and demons, etc., but the real marvel was the simulation of the chill mountain atmosphere, the air of dizziness, of mists that hover over vast crevasses and depths, and make one shiver to look at. The designing, direction, and controlling of the elements in this wonderful scene seemed a bewildering and gigantic task.

The vision of Angels in the last act seemed a little conventional. There were many objections too, taken mostly by Germans, to the treatment of the great story, such as the fixing of the scene at Nuremberg instead of at Leipsic, the placing the drinking bout in the open air and at the tavern door, instead of in Auerbach's cellar. These changes could not, of course, be justified, save on the ground of theatrical expediency.

For seven months, though 'Faust' continued to attract vast houses, it had really, as the manager said, "only started on its wild career." On the occasion of Miss Terry's benefit, he made an interesting, half-jocular speech announcing his plans.

The ninety-ninth night of 'Faust' was celebrated in

a remarkable and somewhat appropriate fashion. The venerable Abbé Liszt was at this time in London, followed with an eager curiosity, affecting even the "cabbies" with interest, who were heard talking of the "Habby List." No one who had seen him at this time will forget the striking personality of this interesting and brilliant man. He was induced to visit the theatre and to witness the performance. After the first act the orchestra broke into his own "Hungarian march," and, being presently recognized by the audience, the great virtuoso received a perfect ovation. He followed the piece throughout with singular interest and applauded with enthusiasm. After the play was over he was welcomed at a supper in the old Beef-steak dining-room, where there were invited to meet him a few distinguished persons. His favourite dishes—"lentil pudding, lamb cutlets, mushrooms in batter"—were prepared for him by Gunter's *chef*. He was delighted with this delicate hospitality. This is one of the many pleasant and dignified memories associated with the Lyceum.

It was when 'Faust' was being played that the catastrophe of the burning of the French Opera Comique occurred. This excited general sympathy, and the kindly manager of the Lyceum engaged that when the proper time came he would furnish assistance. In due course a performance of 'Faust' was announced for the benefit of the sufferers, and a crowded audience assembled. Every one concerned—and they were to be counted by hundreds—gave their

services gratis—the manager behaved in his own liberal style—and as the result, a sum of £419 was despatched to Paris. This service was really as handsomely done as it was substantial; there was no affectation of extraordinary exertion or claim for gratitude; it was indeed but part of the all but princely liberality which reigns in this theatre. It is hard to conceive of the thrifty Parisian managers, who will with difficulty and excessive reluctance admit our English *confrères* to their theatres, despatching such a sum to a London theatre.¹

This liberality was much appreciated by the French press. The *Figaro* devoted an article to a review of the various characters played by the English actor, and in flattering terms pointed out that, notwithstanding all his detractors, Mr. Henry Irving was “the most perfect gentleman.” I presume it was the well-known London correspondent of the paper, who furnished this appreciative notice of his acting: “It is very

¹ The meanness of the French in these matters, considering the lavish hospitality and consideration they receive when they come to London, is incredible. I have been assured by one of the leading London managers, who had purchased many plays from a French manager, that he had to buy his seat for some *première*, the manager being infinitely shocked and “desolated” *after* the transaction. It has always been a matter of particular pride and amusement to myself personally that I extracted from a French director, M. Vizentini, the director of *La Gaiété*, admission for “self and friend”; but this was in acknowledgment of a laudatory article written on his work some time before, and which he had seen. Every one of the profession to whom I have related this incident declared it to be all but incredible!

interesting to see him in his personification of Mephisto; it is something different from the conventional puppet who guzzles and drinks at the Opera, and on all inferior stages. Not that I am altogether at one with Mr. Irving in his conception of Mephisto. Sometimes he accentuates the comic side of the character too much; sometimes he is too tragic. Let a French actor—Mounet Sully, if you like—play Mephisto, and I am convinced he will be more smiling, more politely ironical, with the malicious ease of the adolescent dandy. This elegant interpretation would not prevent Mephisto from becoming, on the summit of the Brocken, a master; amid the thunders, the tremblings of the grey wings of evil spirits, the band of shadows gliding, romping, rushing about with dreadful cries; amid the blasphemous lamentations of gnomes of vice and darkness, a gigantic Satan, whose face is lit up by lightning, and whose hand, which seems to reach the sky, threatens those who try to hide themselves." A vivid description, which was really prompted by the recollections of Irving's performance. "If Mr. Irving," goes on the writer, "does not study the details of his performance so much as the public imagine, he seems, at all events, to do so. Nobody, except perhaps Sarah Bernhardt, has so well studied the science of the picturesque." "He might often serve as a study for a picture," said Mr. Whistler recently to me. "Like Sarah Bernhardt, he knows how to combine grandeur, familiarity, and the licence of simple attitudes." Setting aside some expected

prejudices in favour of what is French, this is really a rather original and faithful view.

During the performance of 'Faust' Miss Terry found the fatigue excessive, and not being very strong at the time, had to resign her part. During these intervals the character was supported by a clever young actress, bearing an historic name, Miss Winifred Emery, who brought much intelligence and refinement to her task. It was generally agreed that, considering her resources, she had supplied the place of the absent actress very well indeed. The *feu sacré* was, of course, not to be expected, and cannot be supplied to order.

CHAPTER XVI.

1887.

FRENCH APPRECIATION OF THE ACTOR—DISCUSSION WITH COQUELIN—‘THE BELLS.’

THIS appreciation of our manager-actor by the French will naturally suggest the inquiry—What is his reputation generally in that eminently theatrical country, whence we draw our chief supply of dramas and dramatic ideas, and whose school of acting is perhaps the first in Europe? So frequent have been the visits of French companies to London, that nearly all the leading performers have had opportunities of seeing the English actor perform. Their ignorance of the language has, of course, stood in the way of a satisfactory judgment—they cannot follow the play as an average Englishman will follow a French piece; but all have been struck by his fine faculty of imparting colour and romance to a character, and have broken into raptures over the intelligence that directs the scene, and the lavish magnificence of the *spectacle*.

The memorable visit of the French comedy to London in 1879, and the fine series of performances

in which every player of note displayed his talent, curiously coincided with the new departure on the English stage. Few will forget the deep impressions left by that season or the opportunities afforded for a liberal education in dramatic taste. With the company came the *fin fleur* of French critics, Sarcey, Claretie (since become director of the company he had so often criticized), and others of less note. These judges were glad to seize an opportunity, which under other circumstances they would never have thought of seeking, of visiting the Lyceum and witnessing the performances of the most distinguished of English actors. I recall Sarcey at this time, a coarsely-built man, with not very refined features, lounging night after night into his stall, with an air of something like arrogance. He did not relish his enforced banishment from the Boulevards, and indemnified himself by making rather free criticisms on the French players. He was induced to go and see some of the English performances, but with an amusing hauteur pleaded his ignorance of the language as an excuse for not passing any serious judgment.

“Having weighed the matter well, I have determined to say very little regarding English actors. I have as yet seen but a few, and those only through the medium of a language imperfectly understood. I should be placing myself in a ridiculous position if I had the impertinence to touch upon matters which I am thus incompetent to deal with. I may remark, however, that Mr. Henry Irving appeared to me a

remarkable actor, notwithstanding a wilful tendency to exaggeration. Possibly, in this latter respect, he followed rather the taste of his audience, whom his instinct judges, than his own deliberate choice."

He then gives high praise to Mr. C. Warner's impersonation of Coupeau in 'Drink,' which he pronounced to be superior to Gil-Naza's, the original creator of the part; but he adds that Mr. William Rignold's playing of another character made him shed tears! This artful mixture of praise and depreciation is truly French, and may also have been a portion of the vengeance with which the writer threatened the English in his notes made during the siege of Paris.

To these brilliant and gifted strangers, however, the new manager did the honours of his craft and extended to them a kindly hospitality. Indeed, since that day, no distinguished artist has visited these shores without being welcomed with rare hospitality.¹

¹ I recall a Sunday morning during this visit, when a message arrived from the manager asking me to join a festive party to Dorking, to which he had invited some members of the French comedy. At the Garrick Club, the favourite coach "Old Times" was waiting, and presently it was "Buzz!—here come the players." A delightful drive it was, and a truly enjoyable day. There was Mounet Sully, the fervent stage lover—then, it was whispered, the prey of a hopeless attachment to the gifted "Sara"—the *spirituel* Delaunay, still a *jeune premier* in spite of his years; with two or three others of the *corps*. Of the party were also my friend Mr. Walter Pollock, with his genial, well-cultured father, the late Sir Frederick; Campbell Clarke, French correspondent to the *Daily Telegraph*, and some other *littérateurs*. There was the drive down to the inviting little town, with a lunch at the old Inn, some wanderings

The most accomplished of French comedians is Coquelin *ainé*, an extraordinary performer, from the versatility and even classical character of his talents. This gifted man, who never appears without imparting intellectual enjoyment of the highest kind, seems to have always been attracted to the English actor; though exhibiting his feelings in an oddly mixed fashion, compounded of admiration and hostility. Analysis of the workings of character is the most entertaining of pastimes, and is, of course, the foundation of theatrical enjoyment; and the public has much relished the controversies between two such eminent personages. In 1886 Coquelin, during a supper at Mrs. Mackay's, was invited in a very flattering way by the Prince of Wales to play in London under Mr. Mayer. At this time, in obedience to the very natural "form and pressure" of gain which was beginning to dissolve the great company of the French Comedy, he had begun to "star it," as it is called, in the various capitals of Europe, and having found himself appreciated in London at private houses, as well as on the stage, he seems to have nourished a feeling that he was contending for the suffrages of the public with the English actor! Not

about its leafy lanes, and a return in the evening to the club, where the host gave a banquet, at which speeches in French and English were delivered. The interesting strangers took away with them the lasting impression that he was "truly a sympathetic personage, with a great deal of French grace and *bonhomie* in his nature."

that he was conscious of any actual "jealousy," but something of this impression was left on those who were watching the incident. In matters of art, however, such contentions are healthy, and pardonable enough.

An early token of this curious feeling was offered in an article published in *Harper's Magazine* in May 1887, where the French actor discussed with some acuteness the different systems of acting in England and in France, particularly in the matter of what is called "natural" or materialistic acting. He dwelt on the question how far the gifts of the comedian will enable him to exhibit tragic characters, contending that the practice of minute observation would materially aid him. This is an interesting question, and were there space, I should be tempted to join in the discussion; and a curious conversation that took place in Paris between the actor and an intelligent English correspondent will throw some further light on this interesting topic.

"Certainly I differ from Mr. Irving," replied M. Coquelin; "but is it not perfectly allowable for two actors to disagree on certain points of their art? Is it not perfectly natural that two artists should discuss with animation that which is their chief care, their joy, their very life and soul? My only regret is that I have been unable to talk over these points with him personally; but all the efforts that have been made by common friends to bring us together have hitherto been sterilized by Mr. Irving, who, in the most

graceful and charming manner in the world, has always managed to avoid meeting me. I ardently desire to meet him, all the more so because we differ. You understand perfectly well that, so far as I am concerned, there is no question of persons in this polemic, if polemic there be; there is question only of art, of processes, of methods, of manners, of conception. Mr. Irving refers to the great masters in painting. On that ground I am prepared to follow him, to carry out the analogy, and to note the distances which separate Velasquez, Titian, Rembrandt, and Raphael. We actors, too, are creators in a way. So in many points concerning our art I differ from Mr. Irving, whom I admire profoundly as an artist in spite of these differences. I have seen him act in a way which has profoundly thrilled me; I applaud the high and deserved respect in which he is held by the English; I deeply respect him myself. But when it comes to the theory and practice of our art I demand permission to differ and to discuss, because the discussion is of vital interest to both of us and to all of our profession, and it is not indifferent to the public also. Mr. Irving's article in the *Nineteenth Century* interested me very much, and suggested many ideas which I shall hope to develop some day when I can find time. I shall answer Mr. Irving, and my hope and desire is that Mr. Irving will reply to my reply. So you see there is no question of polemic, no question of persons; it is a courteous discussion between two artists."

This attenuation of his written remarks shows that this admirable artist was somewhat ashamed of his outburst. Frenchmen, so sensitively and delicately organized, cannot restrain their honest jealousy. He adds: "I cannot admit that Charles I. should be made to walk and talk like Mathias in 'The Bells,' like Hamlet, and like Iago. Mr. Irving, I observe, is sometimes negligent in this matter; but still he sometimes conforms. He changes his voice for Louis XI., for instance. This being so, I fail to comprehend why he plays Mephistopheles with the voice of Romeo." He also complained that Mephistopheles at the Lyceum does not limp—and speaks of the limp merely as a peculiarity to be inferred from the cloven hoof. Irving did limp, and on the authority of Siebel's question, Coquelin then asserts that it is the play that "limps," because the character of Faust is almost suppressed, while Mephistopheles alone is the prominent personage. He then contraverts Irving's view that "realistic portraiture, so important in the comic drama, occupies a comparatively minor place in tragedy, and that those who are skilful in such portraiture may be perfectly incapable of rising to the heights of poetic drama." Coquelin seemed to think that this was levelled at himself. "This sentence," he says, "must have been passed in a moment of that divine inspiration which Mr. Irving makes out to be the privilege of superior artists; for he dispenses with mentioning human reasons in support of his verdict. It becomes me therefore to bow my head. I am afraid," he added, "that Mr. Irving

sacrifices a great deal to scenery; that in making his personages too grand he will finally cause them to lose that humanity which is the true principle of their sublimity. I do not regret that I have preached above everything the study of truth—of that truth which reveals to us the human heart, of that truth which is after all the eternal basis of art, inasmuch as beauty is nothing but the splendour of it.”

It must be confessed that this is dramatic enough, and that this variance of judgment between two great artists is quite legitimate. Nothing but good could come of such a discussion. I confess there is truth in the distinction taken by the English actor—whose restraint and temper were admirably displayed.

What was in Coquelin's thoughts all this time would appear to have been a sort of eagerness to measure himself with the English actor in 'Le Juif Polonais,' which he looked upon as his own, and which had made a reputation for Irving. With some lack of taste or tact, Coquelin later challenged an English audience to decide between the two readings of Mathias. He performed it, I think, on two different occasions. It was an interesting and instructive experiment, for it proved that two artists of eminence might legitimately take directly opposite views of the same character. But does not character in real life offer the same varieties of interpretation? Coquelin presented a sort of comfortable *bourgeois*, a tradesman-like personage, who was not likely to reach the heroic or melodramatic place. He was not over-sensitive, nor was his remorse

very poignant ; and the key-note to his agitation was the desire to be thought respectable, to keep his position, and not be found out. Now this *bourgeois* ideal is purely French, and as the authors themselves were French, I have little doubt that this was their original conception of the character. Lovers of true histrionic *finesse* and analysis may prefer this specimen of the "double intention" to Irving's simpler, more highly-coloured and passionate rendering, the display of the one passion—vehement remorse. This, of course, necessitates the creation of a new character, the re-writing of the part, as it were, by the actor, for his own purposes. The truth is, a play is really little more than a formal indication to the player of the direction in what he should exert himself ; and character, as we know from real experience, is a singularly difficult thing to read.

Be this as it may, it was agreed that the two conceptions were altogether opposed. "Irving's hero was a grave, dignified, and melancholy being ; Coquelin's was a stout Alsatian, well-to-do, respected by his neighbours, but still on an equality with the humble folk around him. Irving's was a conscience-stricken personage ; Coquelin's had no conscience at all. Irving's was all remorse ; Coquelin was not in the least disturbed. He takes delight in his ill-got treasures. The only side on which he is assailable is that of his fears, and the arrival of the second Jew, so like the first, terrifies him ; and too much wine on the night of the wedding brings on the disturbed

dream." The question might be thus summarized: Irving's reading was that of a tragedian; Coquelin's that of a comedian. For myself, I confess a liking to both.¹

A friendly and even enthusiastic appreciation of the actor was furnished by Jules Claretie, then a critic of eminence. "His reputation," he said, "would be even greater than it is if he had the leisure to extend his studies and correct his faults; but, as Mr. Walter Pollock remarks, a man who has to play six or seven times a week can hardly be expected to find much time for study. England, unlike France, does not possess a national theatre.

"'Richelieu' was the first play in which I saw Mr. Irving in London. Here he is superb. The perform-

¹ There is a fine character, Balzac's 'Mercadet,' which furnishes a good illustration of this theory. Many years ago, during the lifetime of the late Charles Mathews, I had written a criticism on what appeared to me his rather too airy interpretation of the character, which I contended was all but tragic, under a mask of comedy. Dr. Johnson's phrase, the agitation should break out through the irrepressible gaiety. Mathews was much displeased at this comment, contending that his light version, and not that of Got, the original performer, was the true one, maintaining also that he did impart a certain tragic tinge to the character. The sequel was amusing and characteristic of this mercurial and genial being. His reply was tart and even bitter, but in a private letter to the writer in quite a different key, he protested that politicians, while they vituperate each other in public, are often on the best terms in private life, etc., suggesting that I should revise my opinion by coming to see him, when he would play the part for my special benefit. On this we became great friends, and only a few weeks before his death he came to see me, when he was found, as he ever was, delightful company.

ance amounts to a resurrection. The great Cardinal, lean, worn, eaten up with ambition, less for himself than for France, is admirably rendered. His gait is jerky, like that of a man shaken by fever; his eye has the depth of a visionary's; a hoarse cough preys upon that feeble frame. When Richelieu appears in the midst of the courtiers, when he flings his scorn in the face of the mediocrity that is to succeed him, when he supplicates and adjures the vacillating Louis XIII., Mr. Irving endows that fine figure with a striking majesty.

“What a profound artist this tragedian is! The performance over, I was taken to see him in his dressing-room. I found him surrounded by portraits of Richelieu. He had before him the three studies of Philippe de Champaigne, one representing Richelieu in full face, and the others in profile. There was also a photograph of the same painter's full-length portrait of the Cardinal. Before playing Louis XI. again, Mr. Irving studied Commines, Victor Hugo, Walter Scott, and all who have written of the *bourgeois* and avaricious king, who wore out the elbows of his *pourpoint de ratine* on the tables of his gossips, the skin-dressers and shoemakers. The actor is an adept in the art of face-painting, and attaches great importance to the slightest details of his costume.

“I asked him what other historical personage he would like to represent, what face he, who excelled in what I call stage-resurrection, would wish to

revive. He reflected a moment, his countenance assuming a thoughtful expression. 'Français ou Anglais?' he at length asked. 'Français ou Anglais: peu importe,' I replied. 'Eh bien!' he said, after another short pause, 'je serais heureux de créer un Camille Desmoulins.' He has, indeed, the energetic type and the *finesse* of the men of the eighteenth century. With his long dark hair and *spirituel* smile he would look the part to the life. There may be more good-nature in his face than was the case with the malicious writer of the *Révolutions de France de Brabant*; he would be rather the Camille of the 'Vieux Cordelier.' But the ill-success of the 'Camille Desmoulins' brought out in Paris last year has discouraged him from attempting the character. He would prefer to represent André Chénier.

"Mr. Irving's literary and subtle mind leans to psychological plays, plays which, if I may so express myself, are more tragic than dramatic. He is the true Shakespearian actor. 'Richelieu,' a work of but little value and false to history, acquires vitality in his hands; he draws it up to his own level. The same is the case with 'The Bells' and 'The Lyons Mail.' Mathias has the deep remorse of a Macbeth; the destiny which governs Hamlet weighs over the head of Lesurques. How great was the pleasure which the performance of 'Hamlet' afforded me! For a literary man it is a source of real enjoyment. Mr. Irving, as manager of the Lyceum, spends more

than £3000 a month to do things on an adequate scale. His theatre is the first in London. He would like to make it a sort of Comédie Française, as he would like to found a sort of Conservatoire to afford young English artists the instruction they stand so much in need of.

“In Louis XI. Mr. Irving has been adjudged superior to Ligier. Dressed with historical accuracy, he is admirable in the comedy element of the piece and the chief scenes with the Monk and Nemours. The lime-light projected like a ray of the moon on his contracted face as he pleads for his life excited nothing less than terror. The hands, lean and crooked as those of a Harpagon—the fine hands whose character is changed with each of his rôles—aid his words. And how striking in its realism is the last scene, representing the struggle between the dying king and his fate!

“In a word, I have been much struck by the beautiful acting of Mr. Irving. I hope that he will be induced to play in Paris. In Shakespearian parts he would create a sensation—would exercise a powerful influence upon many men. It would be curious to see him represent Desmoulins or Chénier in Paris, a piquant thing to be present at the evocation of a French personage by a great English tragedian.”

An admirable French player, Got, once the *doyen* of the French Comédie, and unquestionably the most powerful and varied performer of his day, used to come a good deal to London between the years 1870

and 1880. Some will recall those most piteous of theatrical performances which were given during the French-German war, at the London Opera Comique, by a few stragglers from the great French house. A curious feature of the performance was to see Germans and French in the audience, and the palpable wretchedness, and even fury, of the exiled Frenchman who found himself seated by his hereditary enemy. Another extraordinary incident was the performance of Dejazet as a page, so wonderful for its spirit and juvenility. Yet she had played before Napoleon.

Returning home Got described his impressions of the English actors, though he knew scarcely anything of the English tongue. He oddly enough dwelt upon the stage dressing-rooms, which excited his wrath, and which he described as "holes." The stage curtains, too, he insisted were ragged and threadbare. Toole, he pronounced, had much brilliant and witty *verve*, a criticism which must have astonished that genial performer. Irving he commended, and also the "handsome Miss Neilson," and he was struck by the "clear and graceful acting" of Mr. Rutland Barrington. Got must have been a far better performer than critic.

It was a singular tribute to Irving that this great French player, in his day greater even than Coquelin, should have been drawn from his retirement to take up one of his characters. Got, the "Dean of the French stage," as Irving is "Dean" of the English

theatre, by and by felt himself irresistibly impelled to give his version of this vivid play. He induced a Paris manager to draw forth the long-forgotten piece from its obscurity, and presented Mathias very much on the *bourgeois* lines of Coquelin.

CHAPTER XVII.

1887.

'FAUST'—'WERNER'—'MACAIRE'—THE ACTOR'S SOCIAL GIFTS.

HE was now preparing for his third American tour, the object of which was to introduce to the audiences of the United States his splendid spectacular piece, 'Faust.' This had excited much interest and expectation, and its attractions were even magnified by distance. It was the "last word" in scenic display. The Americans have now become a section, as it were, of the Lyceum audiences, and it would seem to be inevitable that at fixed intervals, and when a series of striking plays have been given in England, the manager should feel a sort of irresistible pressure to present the same attractions on the other side of the Atlantic. This expedition took place in October 1887, and was crowned with all success. Henceforth the periodical visit to America will be a necessity; and, at the moment I write, a new visit has been planned in concert with Mr. Abbey, which is to take place in 1893.

On the return of the company, after their United

States triumphs, 'Faust' was revived for a short period. At the close of the first performance the manager announced his plans, which were awaited with some curiosity. "The devil," he said, "had been to and fro on the face of the earth." After a month of 'Faust' he proposed to give Mr. Calmouris' 'Amber Heart,' to bring forward Miss Terry, while he himself was to conclude the evening with a revival of 'Robert Macaire'—a descent from "the sublime to the ridiculous."

On July 1, 1887, the manager of the Lyceum performed one of those many kindly, graceful acts with which his name is connected—acts done at the right moment and for the suitable person. He gave his theatre to benefit a veteran dramatist, Dr. Westland Marston, who in his day had been associated with the classical glories of the stage, and had written the interesting 'Wife's Secret' for Charles Kean. As he now told the audience from the stage, fifty years had elapsed since he had written his first piece for Macready.

The committee formed was a most influential one, and comprised the names of such eminent *littérateurs* as Browning, Alfred Austin, Mr. Gosse, William Black, Wilkie Collins, Gilbert, Swinburne, Tennyson, and many more. The performance was an afternoon one, and the play selected was Byron's 'Werner,' written "up to date," as it is called, by Frank Marshall. New scenery and dresses had been provided, though the actor did not propose giving

another representation. He, however, intended performing it on his approaching American tour. It must be said the play gave little satisfaction, and was about as lugubrious as 'The Stranger,' some of the acts, moreover, being played in almost Cimmerian gloom. What inclined the manager to this choice it would be difficult to say. He has rather a *penchant* for these morosely gloomy men, who prowl about the stage and deliver long and remorseful reviews and retrospects of their lives. The audience, however, rarely sympathizes, though it listens with respectful attention.

Werner was to illustrate once more the conscientious and laborious care of the manager in the production of his pieces. He engaged Mr. Seymour Lucas to furnish designs for the dresses, who drew his inspirations from an old volume of etchings of one "Stefano della Bella" in 1630. So patiently *difficile* is our manager in satisfying himself, that it is said the dresses in 'Faust' were made and re-made three times before they were found satisfactory. In this case all the arms of antique pattern, the dresses, quaint head-dresses and the like, even down to the peculiar buttons of the period, were made especially in Paris under Auguste's superintendence.

'Robert Macaire,' that strange, almost weird-like drama, was familiar enough to Irving, who had occasionally played it in the early part of his course, and also at the St. James's Theatre in 1867. For all performers of genius who have taste for the mere *diablerie* of acting, and the eccentric mixture of tragic

and comic, this character offers an attraction, if not a fascination. We can feel its power ourselves as we call up the grotesque figure; nay, even those who have never seen the piece can have an understanding of the character, as a coherent piece of grotesque. There is something of genius in the contrasted and yet intimate union between the eccentric pair. In June 1883 there had been a performance at the Lyceum for the Royal College of Music, when Irving had played the character assisted by "friend Toole," Bancroft, Terriss, and Miss Terry—certainly a strong caste. Toole, on this occasion, was almost too irrepressible, and rather distorted the proportion of the two characters, encroaching on the delicate details in the part of his friend, and overflowing with the pantomimic humours, or "gags," which are the traditions of Jacques Strop. When the piece was formally brought out, the part was allotted to Mr. Weedon Grossmith, who was in the other extreme, and almost subordinate.

The play was produced in July 1888, but was not found so attractive as was anticipated. It seemed as though it were not wholly intelligible to the audience. There were some reasons for this, the chief being the gruesome assassination at "the roadside inn," which is old-fashioned, being literally "played out." More curious was it to find that the quaint type of Macaire seemed to convey nothing very distinct. All accepted it as an incoherent extravagance—a sort of farcical compound, but unmeaning. This opens an interesting speculation, viz., How many such parts are

there which have been the characters of the original actors, and not the author's—the former's creation, in short. There is often, too, an accidental concurrence in the conditions of success—something in the air, something in the time and in the audience, which causes “a hit.” Lemaitre's extraordinary success was, as is well known, the result of a happy inspiration conceived during the progress of the piece. From being a serious or tragic character he turned it into a grotesque one. There may have been here something founded on the sort of *gaminerie* that seems to go with crime; it may have been recklessness, which, together with a ludicrous attempt at a squalid dandyism, showed a mind not only depraved but dulled and *embêted*. This sort of inspiration, where an actor sees his own conception in the part and makes it his own, is illustrated by ‘The Bells,’ which, had it fallen into the hands of another actor, would have been played according to conventional laws.

An English actor who might have succeeded in the part was the elder Robson. In Irving's case the audience were not in key, or in tune; the thing seemed *passé*, though our actor had all the traditions of the part, even to the curiously “creaking snuff-box.”¹

¹ This also seemed rather unintelligible to the audience; but its secret was the secret of the creator or originator of the part. Such devices are really significant of something dramatic that has actually prompted them; they become an expression. The revived “business,” therefore, will not serve unless the original spirit attends it. This squeaking snuff-box was a note of *diablerie*, introduced with strange sudden spasms at unexpected moments, and corresponded to the

Among Wills's friends, admirers, and associates—of which his affectionate disposition always brought him a following—was Calmour, the author of some pieces full of graceful poetry of the antique model. Like Mr. Pinero, he "knew the boards," having "served" in the ranks, an essential advantage for all who would write plays; had written several slight pieces of a poetical cast, notably 'Cupid's Messenger,' in which the graceful and piquant Mary Rorke had obtained much success in a "trunk and hose" character. But a play of a more ambitious kind, 'The Amber Heart,' had taken Miss Terry's fancy; she, as we have said, had "created" the heroine at a *matinée*. It proved to be a sort of dreamy Tennysonian poem, and was received with considerable favour.

'The Amber Heart,' now placed in the bill with 'Robert Macaire,' was revived with the accustomed Lyceum state and liberality. To Alexander was allotted the hero's part, and he declaimed the harmonious lines with good effect. I fancy the piece was found rather of too delicate a structure for such large and imposing surroundings.¹

twitches and spasms of Macaire's mind. For the manager I collected much of old Lemaitre's business, with those curious chants with which the robber carried off his villainies. Jingle and Job Trotter were certainly modelled on Macaire and his man; for the piece was being played as *Pickwick* came out.

¹ We may at least admire this writer's perseverance and intrepidity, who from that time has never relaxed his efforts to win the approbation or secure the attention of the public. One could have wished him better success with his later venture and most ambitious attempt, the management of the Avenue Theatre, where he introduced his

Whenever there is some graceful act, a memorial to a poet or player to be inaugurated, it is pretty certain that our actor-manager will be called on to take the leading and most distinguished share in the ceremonial. At the public meeting, or public dinner, he can deport himself with much effect, not making any obtrusive display, yet contributing pleasantly and effectively to the purpose in hand.

There are plenty of persons of culture who have been deputed to perform such duties; but we feel there is something artificial in their methods and speeches. In the case of the actor we feel there is a something genuine; he supplies a life to the dry bones, and we depart knowing that he has added grace to our recollections of the scene. Nor does he add an exaggeration to what he says; there is a happy judicious reserve. This was felt especially on the occasion of one pleasant festival day in the September of 1891, when a memorial was unveiled to Marlowe, the dramatist, in the good old town of Canterbury. It was an enjoyable expedition, with something simple and rustic in the whole, while to any one of poetical tastes there was something unusually harmonious in the combination offered of the antique town, the memory of "Dr. Faustus," the old Cathedral, and the beaming presence of the cultured artist, of whom no

own piece illustrative of "modern English Life," with which his critics, for whom like the sapper nothing is sacred, made merry. He is not likely to be daunted by this, and I have little doubt he will "arrive" at last.

one thought as manager of a theatre. A crowd of critics and authors came from town by an early train, invited by the hospitable Mayor. At any season the old town is inviting enough, but now it was pleasant to march through its narrow streets, under the shadow of its framed houses, to the small corner close to the Christ Church gate of the Cathedral, where the speaking and ceremonials were discharged. The excellent natives seemed perhaps a little puzzled by the new-found glories of their townsman; they were, however, glad to see the well-known actor. Equally pleasant, too, was it to make our way to the old Fountain Inn, where the "worthy" Mayor entertained his guests, and where there were more speeches. The image of the sleepy old town, and the grand Cathedral, and of the pretty little fountain, which, however, had but little suggestion of the colossal Marlowe, and the general holiday tone still lingers in the memory. Irving's speech was very happy, and for its length is singularly suggestive.

"Here, in the birthplace of Marlowe, rich as it is in the commanding associations of our history, you have erected a monument which to future generations will speak with a voice no less potent than the historic echoes of this city. What manner of man Marlowe was in outward seeming I suppose nobody knows; but even if it were familiar to us, the counterfeit presentment could not have the force and significance of the beautiful figure which we owe to the art of the sculptor; but it is not with Marlowe the man that we

need busy ourselves, even if there were more material than there is for a judgment of his brief and sad career, for it is the ideal of the poet whose 'raptures were all air and fire' that must constantly be present to our minds as we gaze on this image of his worship. It recalls some of his own lines which are eloquent of this devotion—

'Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all.'

The man who struck such chords as these is not unworthy of a monument in his native place. It was Marlowe who first wedded the harmonies of the great organ of blank verse which peals through the centuries in the music of Shakespeare. It was Marlowe who first captured the majestic rhythms of our tongue, and whose 'mighty line' is the most resounding note in England's literature. Whatever may be thought of his qualities as a dramatist, and whatever place he may hold amongst the great writers who framed the models of English tragedy, he stands foremost and apart as the poet who gave us, with a rare measure of richness, the literary form which is the highest achievement of expression."

Short as this little address is, I think it will be admitted that nothing could be better suited to the

occasion, or more happily touch the essence of the Marlowe spirit. It furnishes a shadowy epitome of the grandeur of the poet, and the noble lines quoted were sufficient to pique the curiosity of those unfamiliar with the great writer, and to send them to his works.

It was in October 1887 that a memorial was set up at Stratford, a clock-tower and fountain, in memory of Shakespeare. It was the gift of the wealthy Mr. Childs, of New York, who has been hitherto eager to associate his name, in painted windows and other ways, with distinguished Englishmen of by-gone times. It may be suspected that Childs's name will not be so inseparably linked with celebrated personages as he fondly imagined. There is a sort of incongruity in this association of a casual stranger with a poet.

Many a delightful night have his friends owed to the thoughtful kindness and hospitality of this interesting host. Such is, indeed, one of the privileges of being his friend. The stage brings with it abundance of pleasant associations ; but there are a number of specially agreeable memories bound up with the Lyceum. Few will forget the visit of the Duke of Meiningen's company of players to this country, which forms a landmark of extraordinary importance in the history of our modern stage. With it came Barnay, that accomplished and romantic actor ; with a wonderful instinct of disciplining crowds, and making them express the passions of the moment, as in Shakespeare's

‘Julius Cæsar.’ The skilful German stage-managers did not import their crowds, but were able to inspire ordinary bands of supernumeraries with the dramatic feelings and expression that they wanted. Something must, of course, be allowed for the novelty of the impression, as this is a new departure ; and it might be suspected that, with repetition, there would be a monotony in these expressions of feeling. Such expression must of course be very limited, and confined to a few common forms ; otherwise we should have to expect from a crowd the gifts and powers of good actors.¹

What most struck me in the series of plays given by this great company was the infusion of dramatic sentiment and romantic feeling, which suggested, far more than the scenic effects, the sense of dramatic illusion. The beautiful ‘Preciosa’—half opera, half drama—lingers in the memory like a dream, with the enchanting declamation of the leading actress, accompanied by Weber’s exquisite music. We were transported into another sphere—scenery, dresses, and “effects” were all forgotten. It was so with the other

¹ I should be inclined to think that these methods are not strictly legitimate, and that “the crowd” really belongs to scenic effect. It is just as in the case of the “stage army,” which, however vast, will not convey the idea of an army, as we know it can be only, say a hundred men at most manœuvring in a room. My own theory is, that crowd and numbers on the stage are not to be expressed by crowds or numbers ; that numbers are to be suggested on theatrical principles, and that this representation of a crowd does not concern dramatic action at all.

pieces. By this exhibition all thoughtful persons were affected, and the results were lasting.

I recall one summer's Sunday evening at the close of a summer's day, when Irving invited his friends to meet the German performers at the Lyceum. The stage had been picturesquely enclosed and fashioned into a banqueting-room, the tables spread; the orchestra performed in the shadowy pit. It was an enjoyable evening. There was a strange mingling of languages—German, French, English. There were speeches in these tongues, and at one moment Palgrave Simpson was addressing the company in impetuous fashion, passing from English to French, from French to German, with extraordinary fluency. Later in the evening there was an adjournment to the Beef-steak rooms, where the accomplished Barnay found himself at the piano, to be succeeded by the versatile Beatty-Kingston, half German himself. There were abundant "Hochs" and pledgings. Not until the furthest of the small hours did we separate, indebted to our kindly, unaffected host for one yet more delightful evening.

The manager once furnished a pleasantly piquant afternoon's amusement for his friends on the stage of his handsome theatre. Among those who have done service to the stage is Mr. Walter Pollock, now editor of the *Saturday Review*, and who, among his other accomplishments, is a swordsman of no mean skill. He has friends with the same tastes, and with whom he practises this elegant art, such as Mr. Egerton Castle,

Captain Hutton, and others. It is not generally known that there is a club known as the Kerneuzers, whose members are *amateurs enragés* for armour and swordsmanship, many of whom have fine collections of helmets, hauberks, and blades of right Damascene, and Toledo.¹

Mr. Egerton Castle and others of his friends have written costly and elaborate works on fencing and arms and the practice of *armes blanches*, and at their meetings hold exciting combats with dirk and foil. It was suggested that Mr. Castle should give a lecture on this subject, with practical illustrations; and the manager, himself a fencer, invited a number of friends and amateurs to witness the performance, which took place on Feb. 25, 1891. This lecture was entitled "The Story of Swordsmanship," especially in connection with the rise and decline of duelling. And accordingly there was witnessed a series of combats, mediæval, Italian, and others, back-sword, small-sword, sword and cloak, and the rest. Later the performance was repeated at the instance of the Prince of Wales.

Irving has often contributed his share to "benefits" for his distressed brethren, as they are literally called. In the days when he was a simple actor he took his part like the rest; when he became manager he would handsomely lend his theatre, and actually "get

¹ The quaint name of this club, "the Kerneuzers," was suggested by a simple attendant, who actually so described the members; it was his pronunciation of the word "connoisseurs."

up" the whole as though it were one of his own pieces. This is the liberal, *grand* style of conferring a favour.

In June 1876 a performance was arranged at the Haymarket for a benefit, when the ever-blooming 'School for Scandal' was performed by Phelps, Miss Neilson, "Ben" Webster, Irving, Bancroft, and others. Irving was the Joseph Surface, a performance which excited much anticipation and curiosity. Some time after he performed the same character at Drury Lane. It might naturally have been thought that the part would have exactly suited him, but whether from novelty or restlessness, there was a rather artificial tone about the performance. But what actor can be expected to play every character, and to find every character suited to him? Joseph, we hold to be one of the most difficult in the whole *répertoire* to interpret. At the Belford benefit—and Belford and his services to the stage, such as they were, are long since forgotten—the almost enormous sum of £1000 was received. For schools, charities, convents even, and philanthropic work of all kinds, some contribution from Henry Irving in the shape of a recitation or scene may be looked for.

There is always something piquant in these *olla podridas*, got up for the benefit of some favourite actor retiring, or in distress, where all the talent of the town is enlisted on a single play given at a *matinée*. It is of course hurriedly produced and ill-rehearsed, but the public are glad to see so many familiar faces and

figures brought together in this fashion. From an artistic point of view such performances are of course a mistake, the inferior characters being studiously made as prominent as the leading ones, the whole becoming, as it were, "out of drawing" and distorted. At such "gift horses," however, audiences do not look very curiously. There is sometimes, however, much failure and equal disappointment or surprise; some noted actor having made but little of the part allotted to him.

Irving's vein of pleasantry is ever welcome as it is unpretentious. I have heard him at the General Theatrical Fund dinner give the toast of "The Army, Navy, and Reserve Forces," where he said, "There is an Artists' Corps—I am curious to know why there should not be an Actors' Corps. *We are accustomed to handle weapons.* Perhaps these are a little out of date, but for the same reason they might embarrass the enemy." On this occasion "Friend Toole" had to leave on duty; "whose fine Roman visage," said his friend, "has beamed on us during dinner—he has been obliged to go away, fortified I hope for his arduous labours, but he will return—I know him well—and he will too, I am sure, with a most excellent donation." He can tell a story or relish a humorous situation with equal effect. In company with his friend Toole, he has often contrived a droll situation or comic adventure. Once, when visiting Stratford-on-Avon with Toole, he saw a rustic sitting on a fence, whom they submitted to an interrogatory. "That's Shake-

speare's house, isn't it?" it was asked innocently. "Ees." "Ever been there?" "Noä." "How long has he been dead?" "Dunno." "What did he do?" "Dunno." "Did he not write?" "Oh yes, he did summat." "What was it?" "Well, I think he writ *Boible*."

A pleasantry that both the players once contrived in Scotland, at the expense of an old waiter at a hotel, is of a higher order of merit than such hoaxes usually offer. At this country house they had noted that the spoons, forks, etc. seemed to be of silver, and with some artfully-designed emphasis they questioned him about the property. As soon as he had gone out, they concealed all the plate, and, having rung the bell, jumped out of the window, which was close to the ground, and hid themselves in the shrubbery. The old man re-entered, and they heard his cries of rage and astonishment at the robbery, and at the disappearance of the supposed thieves. He then rushed from the room to summon the household. The rest of the story is worth giving in Irving's words, as reported by Mr. Hatton.

"We all crept back to the room, closed the window, drew down the blind, relighted the gas and our cigars, put each piece of silver back into its proper place, and sat down to wait for our bill. We could hear Sandy, at the top of his voice, telling the story of the robbery; and in a few minutes we heard evidently the entire household coming pell-mell to the dining-room. Then our door was flung open; but the crowd, instead of

rushing in upon us, suddenly paused *en masse*, and Sandy exclaimed, 'Great God! Weel, weel! Hae I just gane clean daft?'

"'Come awa', drunken foo', come awa'!' exclaimed the landlord, pulling Sandy and the rest back into the passage and shutting the door; but we could hear how both master and wife abused poor Sandy, who did nothing but call upon his Maker and declare, if he had to die that minute, when he went into the room it was empty of both guests and silver. He was told to go to bed and sleep off his drunk, and thank his stars that his long service saved him from instant dismissal."

At one period, when he was oppressed with hard work, it was suggested to him that sleeping in the country would be a great restorative after his labours. He much fancied an old house and grounds at Hammersmith, known as "The Grange"; and having purchased it, laid out a good deal of money in improving and restoring it. It had nice old gardens, with summer-house, a good staircase, and some old panelled rooms.

To a man with such social tastes, the journey down and the night spent must have been banishment, or perhaps was found too troublesome for a result. Literary men, artists, and the like do not much relish these tranquil pleasures, though practical men of business do. I am certain most will agree that they leave Fleet Street and the Strand with reluctance and return to it with pleasure. After a few years he was

anxious to be rid of what was only a useless toy, and it was offered for sale for, I think, £4000.¹

¹ Quite a number of relics of great actors have, as we have already shown, found their way to Irving's custody; and there is always something pleasant for him to think of when he recalls the presentation. Thus on his visit to Oxford he had spoken of the last days of Edmund Kean, who had died in sore straits. A few days later he received a purse of faded green silk found in the pocket of the great actor just after his death, and found empty. It had been given by Charles Kean to John Forster, and by him to Robert Browning. Edmund and Charles Kean, Forster, Browning, and Irving form a remarkable pedigree. "How can I more worthily place it," wrote Browning, "than in your hands, if they will do me the honour to take it, with all respect and regard?"

Among innumerable testimonies to the popularity of Irving and Miss Terry was one of a rather bizarre kind. A firm brought out a "Lyceum *Dresslining*," which was printed all over with portraits of the actor and actress, in miniature, and with scenes from 'Romeo and Juliet.' "The wearing of *such a lining*," it was urged, "would make more people wish to go upon the stage"—a rather mysterious exercise of "operative power."

CHAPTER XVIII.

1888.

‘MACBETH’—‘THE DEAD HEART’—‘RAVENSWOOD.’

THE approach of the opening night of ‘Macbeth’ caused more excitement than perhaps any of the Lyceum productions. There was a sort of fever of expectancy; it was known that everything in the way of novelty—striking and sumptuous dress and scenery, elaborate thought and study, and money had been expended in almost reckless fashion. I fancy, too, that the monumental grandeur of the piece itself, casting its shadow before and curiously piquing speculation and rousing the interest and wonder as to how particular favourite scenes would be treated, had much to do with this. The newspapers, too, were filled with notes and anticipations, and various items of the preparation were allowed to leak out. There were legends afloat as to Miss Terry’s marvellous “beetle-green” dress, and the copper-coloured hair which was

to hang down on her shoulders.¹ The scenery was to be vast, solid, and monumental. It was no surprise when it was learned that before the day of performance some two thousand pounds had been paid for seats at the box-office.

Irving's performances have often been profusely illustrated in the various newspapers, but this of Macbeth seems to have put all the artists on their mettle. In my own collection I can count about forty pictures, some of really striking merit. Such was the fine series of spectacular drawings, the work of Mr. H. Railton, contributed to the *Sporting and Dramatic News*.

On the eve of the production a pamphlet appeared, written by Mr. J. Comyns Carr, a man of much taste and varied accomplishments, which was presumed to be inspired and to contain the official interpretation of the tragedy taken by the two chief performers. It was felt necessary to prepare the public for Irving's and Miss Terry's conceptions of their respective characters. Macbeth was to be brought down from his purely heroic level, and portrayed as a gloomy, faltering being; while Miss Terry's *physique* and personality seemed rather opposed to the type

¹ One of these many "snappers-up of trifles" described the night-gown worn by Lady Macbeth in her sleep-walking scene, which was all of wool knitted into a pretty design. Mrs. Comyns Carr designed Miss Terry's dresses, which certainly did not lack bold originality. There was the curious peacock blue and malachite green dress which contrasted with the locks of copper-coloured hair out of which the half American artist, Mr. Serjeant, formed a striking but not very pleasing portrait.

hitherto accepted. The writer adroitly prepared the public for the new presentation, and urged, it must be said with force, the perfect "openness" of the question, as it might be considered. He showed that Lady Macbeth was feminine enough—"a bundle of nerves" full of miserable weaknesses, and that it was owing to the accident of Mrs. Siddons having such stately proportions that a sort of ideal standard had been set up. To portray Lady Macbeth as a sort of *lusus natura*, a man in a woman's body, is to miss the significance of many of her finest touches. This thesis Mr. Comyns Carr pleaded with much ingenuity, though it is not the place here to reproduce his arguments; but the incident is worth noting here as an incident of this remarkable revival, and as illustrating, too, the manager's resolve to spare nothing to secure success.¹

¹ The enthusiasm and interest in these Lyceum nights has been working up year by year, and it has even become customary for the papers to give extraordinary and, it must be said, ludicrous sketches of the state of things "in front of the house." "Would you believe it?" writes an observer. "As I was passing up the Strand at eleven this morning, I saw a small crowd of people peering into the darksome depths of the entrance to the Lyceum pit. I joined them to discover the meaning of the smiles which bewrayed their countenances. I found they were looking at a little band of enthusiasts who were waiting for the pit doors to open, which they will do about seven o'clock this evening, I suppose. I counted ten gentlemen and four ladies. Presently some of Mr. Irving's men came out and put up a big board to serve as a barrier. The enthusiasts adapted themselves to the board, and squatted down again on their haunches quite composedly. The ladies, in sombre black, such as befits a tragedy, munched at papers of sandwiches :

While allowing due praise to the accomplishments and sagacity of our dramatic critics, I confess to looking with some distrust and alarm at a sort of "new criticism" which, like the so-called "new humour," has developed in these latter days. This amounts to the assumption of an aggressive personality—there is a constant manifestation, not of the play or performers criticized, but of the writer's own thoughts and opinions. It seems to be the fashion for a critic to devote his article to Mr. —, an opposing critic, as though the public attached any importance to the opinions these gentlemen held of each other. The vanity thus unconsciously displayed is often ludicrous enough. The instances, however, are fortunately rare.

Produced on Dec. 29, the play caused considerable excitement among Shakespearian students and "constant readers"; and Miss Terry's reading—or rather the appearance of Miss Terry in her part—produced much vehement controversy. We had "The Real Macbeth" in the *Daily Telegraph*, with the usual "old play-goers" who had seen Mrs. Charles Kean. I fancy there were but three or four persons who were able to compare the performances of Miss Terry with that of Mrs. Siddons—about sixty years before.¹

three of the gentlemen smoked their pipes, another conned an acting edition of the play, another was groping for truth and information in critic Carr's canary-covered pamphlet, another was calmly reading a morning paper."

¹ It was likely that the majority of these persons were incapacitated by age from forming a judgment on this matter; but it was curious that I should have conversed with two persons at least who were

Banquo's ghost has always been a difficulty in every presentation of the play ; all the modern apparitions and phantasmagorian efforts neutralize or destroy themselves. The powerful light behind exhibits the figure through the gauzes, but to procure this effect the lights in front must be lowered or darkened. This gives notice in clumsy fashion for what is coming, and prepares us for the ghost.

"New and original" readings rarely seem acceptable, and, indeed, are scarcely ever welcomed by the public, who have their old favourite lines to which they are well accustomed. We never hear one of these novelties without an effect being left as of something "purely fantastical," as Elia has it, and invariably they seem unacceptable and forced, producing surprise rather than pleasure. Irving rarely introduces these changes. A curious one in 'Macbeth' was the alteration of a line—

capable of making the comparison. One was Mr. Fladgate of the Garrick Club, a most interesting man, well stored with anecdotes of Kemble, Kean, and others, and who, once in the library of the club, gave me a vivid delineation of the good John's methods in 'The Stranger.' The other was Mr. Charles Villiers, who is, at the moment I write, in about his ninetieth year. A most characteristic incident was a letter from the veteran Mrs. Keeley, with much generous criticism of Miss Terry's performance, thus showing none of the old narrow spirit which can only "praise by-gone days." She frankly added that until visiting the Lyceum she had never witnessed a performance of the play from one end to the other, though she had seen many a great performer in it, and had herself performed in it. This recalls Mrs. Pritchard, one of the great Lady Macbeths, who, as Dr. Johnson said, "had never seen the fifth act, as it did not fall within her part."

into "She should have died hereafter,"

"She would have died hereafter."

That is a sort of careless dismissal of his wife's death, as something that must have occurred, according to the common lot. Curious, too, was the alteration of the familiar

"If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well," etc.;

The irresolution and generally craven tone of the Scottish king, as presented by the actor, was much criticized, and severely too. There was something "craven," it was said, in this constant faltering and shrinking. This, however, was the actor's conscientious "reading" of the part: he was not bound by the Kemble or Macready traditions, but was irresistibly impelled to adapt the highly-coloured "romantic" view of our day. He made it interesting and picturesque, and, in parts, forcible. Miss Terry's Lady Macbeth filled every one with wonder and admiration; as in the case of her Queen Katherine, it seemed a miracle of energy and dramatic inspiration, triumphing over physical difficulties and habitual associations. The task was herculean, and even those who objected could not restrain their admiration.¹

¹ Charles Reade's strange, odd appreciation of this gifted, mercurial woman is worth preserving:—

"Ellen Terry is an enigma. Her eyes are pale, her nose rather long, her mouth nothing particular, complexion a delicate brick-dust, her hair rather like tow. Yet, somehow, she is *beautiful*. Her expression *kills* any pretty face you see beside her. Her figure is lean and bony, her hand masculine in size and form. Yet she is a pattern

The pictures set forth in this wonderful representation linger in the memory. The gloomy Scottish scenes, the castles and their halls, the fine, spreading landscapes, the treatment of the witches, and Banquo's ghost were all but perfect in tone and had a judicious reserve. There was nothing overlaid or overdone. How admirably and exactly, for instance, did the scene correspond to the beautiful lines—

"This castle hath a pleasant seat,
The air nimbly and sweetly doth recommend itself."

There painting and poetry went together. The banquet-hall, the arrangement of the tables, at right angles with the audience, had a strange, barbaric effect, the guests being disposed in the most natural fashion.

After the run of 'Macbeth' had ceased, the manager proceeded to carry out a plan which had long been in his thoughts, and which many had suggested to him. This was to give "readings," in conjunction with Miss Terry, of some of his plays. This would offer some respite from the enormous outlay entailed by producing these great pieces at his theatre. One could fancy that nothing could be more attractive than such "readings," the interest in the personality of the

of fawn-like grace. Whether in movement or repose grace *pervades the hussy*. In character impulsive, intelligent, weak, hysterical—in short all that is abominable and charming in woman. Ellen Terry is a very charming actress. I see through and through her. Yet she pleases me all the same. *Little Duck!*"

This suggests the old rhyme :—

"Thou hast so many pleasing, tearing ways about thee,
There's no living with thee or without thee."

two great performers being so generally diffused. He re-arranged 'Macbeth' for this purpose, and set off on a tour in the provinces. But though everywhere well received, I think the plan did not command the full success that was expected. There was a defect somehow in the plan: two characters seemed to rob the performance of that *unity* which is the charm of a reading. Further, it was illustrated by the fine music, with orchestra, etc., and this again disturbed the natural simplicity of a reading. The actor's own vividly-coloured imagination and tastes could not in fact be content with the bald and *triste* mechanisms of the ordinary reader: he tried to impart what ornamentation he could. The experiment was not, however, carried out very long.¹

Some thirty years before, in the old Adelphi days, when "Ben" Webster was ruling, a drama was produced, the work of a hard-working, drudging dramatist, Watts Phillips. It was a pure melodrama, and people had not yet lost their faith in the old devices. There was an honest belief that villainy would be punished ere the end came. By the laws of such pieces, the most painful situations were always contrasted with

¹ It was interesting to note, at a St. James's Hall performance, June 25, the pleasant, eager vivacity of the actress, who, familiar as she was with the play, seemed to be repeating with her lips all the portions in which she was not concerned. In the more dramatic portions, it was plain she was eager to be on the scene once more. As she sat, she anxiously waited for the orchestra to come in at their proper places, sometimes giving them the signal. This very natural behaviour interested every one.

scenes of broadest farce, which were supposed to relieve the excited feelings. I well recall these humours. On the revival, however, all this was softened away or abolished, and, I fancy, with some injury to the constitution of the old piece.

The production of 'The Dead Heart' furnished one more instance of the tact and abilities which have secured the manager of the Lyceum his high position. Here was a piece of an old-fashioned kind, and which, had it been "revived" at an ordinary theatre, would have been found not only flat and stale, but unprofitable for all concerned. Our manager, seeing that there was dramatic life and situations, brought the whole into harmony with the times, and, by the skilful *remaniement* of Mr. Walter Pollock, imparted to it a romantic grace. It is admitted that he himself has rarely been fitted with a part so suited to his genius and capacities, or in which he has roused the sympathies of his audience more thoroughly. It is only the romantic actor that understands what might be called the *key* of a play. We have plenty of effective, strident performers who would have presented Robert Landry as the robust opponent of tyranny—defiant, and, towards the close, pitilessly revengeful. The Abbé, too, would have followed the immemorial precedent of the other "crafty," insinuating abbés who have so often figured on the stage. The heroine had *her* precedent too: she should have been admired, tempestuous, suffering, with plenty of declamation. The leading "comique," who, in the remoter per-

formance, came riding in on a cannon, ought to revel in his fooling, as a sort of revolutionary humorist. But in the present revival these things were softened away, and graduated as in a picture; some figures being merely sketched, some put in the background, nothing being intrusive.

In this picturesque part of Robert Landry were exhibited no less than four contrasted phases of character: the gay, hopeful young artist; the terribly metamorphosed prisoner of nearly twenty years; the recently delivered man, newly restored to the enjoyment of life; and, lastly, the grim revolutionary chief, full of his stern purpose of vengeance. This offered an opening for the display of versatile gifts, which were certainly brought out in the most striking contrast. But it was in the later scenes of the play, when he appears as the revolutionary chief, that our "manager-actor" exhibited all his resources. Nothing was more artistic than the sense of restraint and reserve here shown, which is founded on human nature. A person who has thus suffered, and with so stern a purpose in view, will be disdainful of speech, and oppressed, as it were, with his terrible design. It is a common error that dramatic feeling must be expressed in words; but it might almost be said that unvoiced expression is infinitely more telling and dramatic than any form of words. All through this portion of the play Irving's bearing and glances were in this spirit; his answers made in this language. Quiet, condensed purpose, without any "fiendish" emphasis, was never better

suggested. Even when the drop-scene is raised, and he is revealed standing by his table, there is the same morose unrelenting air, with an impression that here was one who had just passed through the fire, and had been executing an act of vengeance which had left its mark.

There is a darkened chamber in the prison whence Landry goes forth to make his sacrifice, the meeting of the mother and son following. After an interval the background lightens, and a misty vision is seen, behind, of the tumbril moving on to the guillotine, with the admirably posed figure of Landry erect. To most spectators this seemed to be the fitting and sufficient conclusion. But what followed was a true surprise. With a fine, almost imperceptible, progress, the background seemed to dissolve, leaving not a rack behind; figures began to grow and multiply, a sort of lurid tone came over all, and there was revealed the whole scene of the scaffold, with the long row of revolutionary soldiers ranged, their backs to the audience. This living shadowy barrier between the reality and the vision seemed wonderfully effective. There was nothing of the usual pretentious "tableau" in this; the idea was conveyed that this scene was before the mind of the mother and son, which, in those high-strung, nervous days, it might well be. The judicious *reserve* of the whole change, and the perfect repose, made it almost a dreamy intellectual operation, contrasted with the usual upheavings and "clatterings" with which such things are usually done.

In a drama like 'The Dead Heart,' music forms a fitting accompaniment, furnishing colour and appropriate illustration. It is almost uninterrupted from beginning to end. M. Jacobi of the Alhambra furnished some effective, richly-coloured strains to 'The Dead Heart,' alternately gay and lugubrious. More, however, might have been made of the stirring 'Marseillaise,' which could have been treated in various disguises and patterns as a sort of *Leitmotiv*, much as Litolf has done in his symphonic work on the same subject.

A Scotch play—an adaptation of *The Bride of Lammermoor*—was now prepared by Mr. Herman Merivale, a dramatist of much poetical feeling, but whose course was marked by piteous and disastrous incidents. Buoyed up by the encouragement and admiration of his friends and of kindly critics who found merit in all he did, he struggled on in spite of miserable health and a too highly-strung nervous temperament. His work showed refinement and a certain elegance, but more for the reader than the playgoer. A gleam of prosperity, however, came when Mr. Toole began to figure in the writer's grotesque pieces, 'The Don,' and others, and to which indeed his painstaking wife had contributed some share. A piece of his, called 'The White Pilgrim,' was to illustrate on a rather grotesque scale the uncertainties of public favour as well as the unmeaning character of the applause sometimes lavished by injudicious friends. It was first produced at a *matinée*, and sundry critics had never ceased bewailing

the untimely fall of so poetical a writer. Whenever a piece of merit was brought out, there was a sort of clamour for 'The White Pilgrim,' with reproaches to the ignorance and stupidity of an uncurious age. This went on for some years, until in an awkward moment some too-confiding manager obeyed the call. 'The White Pilgrim' reappeared, and having been present myself, I must agree with those who found it tedious and undramatic. 'The White Pilgrim' was received in respectful silence, but the critics called for it no more.

The new piece, which was called 'Ravenswood,' had lain long in the manager's cabinet, where at this moment repose a number of other MSS., "commanded" and already purchased, from the pen of Wills, Frank Marshall, and others. The latter had fashioned Robert Emmett into a picturesque figure, the figure and bearing of the manager having no doubt much that suggested the Irish patriot; but the troubled periods of Land Leagues and agrarian violence set in at the time of its acceptance with an awkward *à propos*. It was felt to be a too dangerous experiment, and the manager ran the risk of being credited with more than a dramatic interest in such a character.¹ It may be doubted, too, if a piece on such a subject was likely to be dramatic; it would at least require the picturesque touch of a Boucicault, the skilful contriver

¹ In his evidence before the Theatre Committee in April 1892, Irving stated that "the censure" would not sanction the production of the play.

of Colleen Bawns and Arrah na Pogues, to impart an Irish, stirring action. Another play was written for him on the subject of 'Mahomet,' and which he was inclined to bring out; but here again authority interposed, and "invited him," as the French so politely have it, to abandon his purpose. It was at the end of the summer season of 1879 that our manager, after naming these pieces, spoke of others which he had in reserve, either revivals or wholly new ones. It is interesting to think that he had thought of the stormy and pathetic 'Gamester,' which has ever an absorbing attraction; 'The Stranger' also was spoken of; but their treatment would have offered too many points of similarity to Eugene Aram and other characters of "insipissated gloom." On this occasion, when speaking of "the romantic and pathetic story" of Emmett, he announced a drama on the subject of Rienzi, which his friend Wills had prepared for him, but which has never yet seen the light. Years have rolled by swiftly since that night, and the author was often heard to bewail the delays and impediments which hindered the production of what he had no doubt considered his finest performance. Another great drama long promised and long due was 'Coriolanus,' for which Mr. Alma Tadema has designed scenery. The chivalric character of the hero with its fine dash and spirit would have been of excellent service in developing an almost new side of our actor's qualities. For a character thus often unexpectedly transforms the player and evokes new gifts.

There is a character, indeed, in which, as the tradition runs, he formerly made almost as deep an impression as in 'The Bells.' This was Bill Sikes, and we can conceive what a savagery he would have imparted to it. It would seem to be exactly suited to his powers and to his special style ; though of course here there would be a suggestion of Dubosc. With Miss Terry as Nancy here would be opened a realm of squalid melodrama, and "Raquin-like" horrors.

There are other effective pieces which seem to invite the performance of this accomplished pair. Such, for instance, is the pathetic, heartrending 'Venice Preserved.' Though there might be a temptation here for the scenic artist—since Venice, and its costumes, etc., would stifle the simple pathos of the drama. 'The Taming of the Shrew' has been often suggested and often thought of, but it has been effectively done at this theatre by another company. 'The Jealous Wife'—Mr. and Mrs. Oakley—would also suit well. There is 'The Winter's Tale,' and finally 'Three Weeks after Marriage'—one of the most diverting pieces of farcical comedy that can be conceived.

'Ravenswood' was produced on September 20, 1890. While its scenes were being unfolded before us one could not but feel the general weakness of the literary structure, which was unequal to the rich and costly setting ; neither did it correspond to the broad and limpid texture of the original story. It was unfortunately cast, as I venture to think. Mackintosh,

who performed Caleb, was somewhat artificial; while Ashton *père* and his lady, rendered by Bishop and Miss Le Thièrè, could hardly be taken *au sérieux*. Irving infused a deep and gloomy pathos into his part, and Miss Terry was, as ever, interesting, touching, and charming. But the characters, as was the story, were little more than thinly outlined. The scenes, however, unfolded themselves with fine spectacular effect; nothing could be more impressive than the scene of the first act—a mountain gorge where Ravenswood has come for the entombment of his father, and is interrupted by the arrival of his enemy, Ashton. But it was felt that there was a disproportion between the grand scenic expression and the rather trivial result, a merely spectacular interruption of a funeral being too trivial a matter to fill the whole of an act. It carried us “no forrader”; for the enmity between the pair was assumed to exist before the play began. Another objection was that the scenes and figures of Donizetti’s opera were perpetually being suggested, and it must be said the fine musical interpretation was more dramatically expressive than the mere spoken words. Who can forget the impassioned scene of the marriage contract so worked up, so finely illustrated by the music? Beside it the Merivale version appeared bald enough. The weird-like last scene, the “Kelpie Sands,” with the cloak lying on the place of disappearance, the retainer gazing in despair, was one of Irving’s finely poetical conceptions, but it was more spectacular than dramatic.

The truth is, where there is so fine a theatre, and where all arts are supplied to set off a piece in sumptuous style, these elements require substantial stuff to support them, otherwise the effect becomes trivial in exact proportion to the adornment.

Irving has been often challenged for not drawing on the talent of native dramatists, and for not bringing forward "new and original" pieces. The truth is, at this moment we may look round and seek in vain for a writer capable of supplying a piece large and forcible enough in plot and character to suit the Lyceum. We have Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, but they are writers of comedies. Wills, in spite of his faults, had genuine faith in the old methods. He was of the school of Westland Marston. In this dearth of talent, it might be well for Irving to give a commission to a French dramatist to work on whatever subject he fancied, and have the piece adapted.

CHAPTER XIX.

1892.

'HENRY VIII.'

IT was at the Christmas season of 1891 that the manager was enabled to carry out a plan that had for years been before him—a revival of 'Henry VIII.' We can quite conceive how, as the fashion always was with him, the play ripened as it were with meditation; how, as he walked or followed the consoling fumes of his cigar in his chamber at Grafton Street, each scene fell into shape or suggested some new and effective arrangement, which again might be discarded as difficulties arose, or as something happier occurred to him. The result of these meditations was unquestionably a "large" and splendid "setting" of the work, and to my mind, whatever be the value of the opinion, this is certainly one of the finest, most finished, most poetical, and sufficient of the many works that he has set before us.¹ There was a greater Shakespearian

¹ An American lady, a Californian artist, was the first to enter the pit for the opening performance of 'Henry VIII.' at the Lyceum. "I and a friend went with our camp-stools and took our places next the door at ten o'clock in the morning. We were provided with a

propriety, and the adornments, however lavish, might all be fairly justified. Most to be admired was the supreme elegance of touch found in every direction—acting, scenery, dresses, music, all reflected the one cultivated mind. The truth is, long practice and the due measuring of his own exertion have now supplied an ease and boldness in his effects. To appreciate this excellence we have only to turn to similar attempts made by others, whether managers, or manager-actors, or manager-authors—and we find only the conventional exertion of the scene-painter and stage-manager. They have not the same inspiration.

This play, produced on January 5, 1892, was received with great enthusiasm. It became “a common form” of criticism to repeat that it was of doubtful authorship; that it was nothing but a number of scenes strung together; that there was no story; that Buckingham vanished almost at the beginning of the play;¹ and that towards the end,

volume of *Harper's Magazine*, a sketch-book, writing-paper, and a fountain-pen, caricatures of Henry Irving, and much patience. A newspaper spread under the feet and a Japanese muff warmer, with sandwiches and a bottle of wine, kept us comfortable. Two ladies were the next comers, and shortly a crowd began to collect. Real amusing it was, but not very elegant. After about two hours Mr. Bram Stoker came and had a look at us, and cheered our hearts by telling us that tea would be served from the neighbouring saloon (public-house). At last, at seven o'clock, we were rewarded for our patience by getting seats in the front row. The play was superb, and the audience—well, every one looked as if he had done something.”

¹ “During the preparations for this play there was the usual eager anticipations, and the ‘snappers-up’ of trifling news were on the *qui vive* to secure the smallest inkling. Historical documents had

Wolsey vanished also. These, as I venture to say, are but ignorant objections; characters will always supply a dramatic story, or a dramatic interest that amounts to a story, and in the fate of Wolsey and of Katherine, gradually developed and worked out, we

been consulted, trustworthy authorities referred to, and archives ransacked, with a view to render the performance as complete as possible. The assistance of Mr. Seymour Lucas, A.R.A., and Mrs. Comyns Carr has been requisitioned in order to ensure accuracy in the costumes. Some of the sets present pictures of such solidity and beauty as it is no exaggeration to say have never been surpassed on any stage. Among these are 'The King's Stairs at Westminster,' a 'Street in Westminster,' and the final tableau showing Greenwich with the church of Grey Friars. In the matter of pageantry also the record will certainly be beaten by the trial and coronation scenes, in which the fullest use of the resources at Mr. Irving's command has been made. With the exception of certain well-advised 'cuts' and the alteration of one or two interiors into exteriors, the original text has been scrupulously respected. Very wisely, however, Mr. Irving has followed the plan adopted by Charles Kean of compressing the last act into one scene. That Mr. Irving's appearance differs essentially from that with which Holbein's portrait of the great Cardinal has familiarized us is a matter of no consequence. In the first act Miss Terry wears a gown of a heavy, dull material, interwoven with threads of steel and ornamented with gold, the bodice being square-cut and adorned with long hanging sleeves. The head-gear is of black and gold, and resplendent with brilliant jewels. Her second costume is comparatively simple, being entirely black relieved by a rich brocade, while on her head is worn a close-fitting cap of darkest hue. The third and last costume is of a rich purple, trimmed at the neck with fur. One feature of the production is that the whole of the magnificent brocades, velvets, and silks of which the costumes are made have been specially produced by Messrs. Collinson and Lock, and woven in English looms by English workmen. As Henry VIII., Mr. William Terriss makes up so as to reproduce in exact detail Holbein's portrait of that monarch."

had surely a story sufficiently interesting. I have little doubt that Irving kept steadily in view the object the great author had before him, viz. to present a page of history enriched by all the suitable accompaniments of dress and manners and customs. In this he was perfectly and triumphantly successful. We were taken into the great chambers, and tribunals; shown the ecclesiastical pomp and state, so difficult to conceive now; the processions passing through the streets, and presented in an exceedingly natural and unconventional fashion.¹ The drama was set forth fully, with every adjunct of dress, furniture, scenes, and numbers of auxiliaries. It was, indeed, stated that over five hundred persons passed the stage door every night. And yet in the marshalling of the numbers there was an admirable freedom and no crowding.

The scenery, offering wonderful perspectives of Tudor halls and interiors, the arrangements of the courts and various meetings, were original and very striking. Yet here I would be inclined to suggest anew the objections often made to the modern system of large groupings compressed into the small area of a stage, and which, as it seems, is opposed to

¹ As an instance of the manager's happy touch in a trifling matter, we might name the State trumpets constantly "blaring" and sounding as the King approached, and which offered nothing of the usual "super" arrangement. The men seemed to tramp along the street as though conscious of their own dignity, warning those whom it might concern to make way for their high and puissant lord.

the canons of scenic art.¹ These, too, seemed to acquire new force from the arrangement of the "Trial scene," as it was called, which displayed a great hall with the dais, seats for the Cardinal, the King, etc. The result of thus supplying a great area by the system of compression (I am speaking merely of the principle), was that the leading figures become dwindled in scale and overpowered by the surrounding crowd. The contrast with the older system is brought out by Harlow's well-known picture, where only the leading figures are grouped, and where by consequence they stand out in greater relief. The spectator stands, as it were, close beside them; but by the modern arrangement he appears to be afar off, at the bottom of the hall, obtaining but a distant view of them.²

¹ It was publicly stated that the "mounting" of this play had cost £15,000, and that the weekly expenses were some £800. The manager wrote to contradict this, as being altogether beyond the truth; though, he added, with a sigh as it were, that he heartily wished the second statement were true, and that the expenses could be put at so low a figure.

² According to one writer, "an emissary was sent to Rome to acquire a Cardinal's robe there. After some time a friend managed to secure one of the very period, whereupon an exact copy, 'both of colour and texture,' was made. A price has to be paid for scenic splendours in the shape of the delays that they necessarily occasion. Thanks to the ingenuity of stage carpenters and machinists, these delays at the Lyceum are reduced to a minimum time. 'Henry VIII.' being not one of the longest of the plays—though it is one-third longer than 'Macbeth'—the text at the Lyceum has been treated with comparative leniency. 'Hamlet,' on the other hand, which comprises nearly four thousand lines, cannot on the modern system of sumptuous mounting possibly be given in anything approaching its entirety." As a fact, very nearly one-half the play

When we consider what are the traditions of the two great characters, how vivid they are, from the deep impressions left by the great brother and sister on their contemporaries, and which has really extended to our time, too much praise could hardly be given to the performance of Irving and his gifted companion. Irving's Wolsey was exactly what those familiar with his other impersonations could anticipate—poetical, elegant, and in many portions powerful. He was the churchman to perfection, carrying his robes admirably; in the face there was a suggestion of the late departed Cardinal Manning. All through the piece there was that truly picturesque acting which fills the eye, not the ear, at the moment when speech is at rest. It is thus that are confuted those theorists, including Elia, who hold that Shakespeare is to be read, not acted.

It is perhaps the power of suggestion and of stirring our imagination that brings about this air of fullness and richness. Irving, when he was not speaking, *acted* the pomp and state, and consummately deprecating smoothness of the Cardinal. As he moved about you felt the application of the oft-quoted line, touching the absence of "the well-grac'd" actor from the scene, and it was wonderful to think, as we glanced round the brilliant *salle*—glittering with its vast crowd of well-dressed, even jewelled, women ("Quite an

disappears from the modern acting copies. My friend Mr. W. Pollock, in a paper in the *National Review*, has justly urged in this connection that half a 'Hamlet' is better than no 'Hamlet' at all.

opera pit!" as Ellison would say)—to the fine stage before us, with its showy figures, pictures, and pageants, that all this was *his* work and of his creation!

There were many diverse criticisms on Irving's conception of this famous character; some held it was scarcely "large," rude, or overbearing enough. His view, however, as carried out, seemed natural and consistent. The actor wished to exhibit the character as completely overwhelmed by adverse fortune; witness Macbeth, Othello, and many other characters. In the last great soliloquy it was urged there was a want of variety. Still, allowing for all traditional defects, it stands beyond contradiction that it was a "romantic" performance, marked by "distinction," and a fine grace; and we might vainly look around for any performer of our time who could impart so poetical a cast to the character. And we may add a praise which I am specially qualified to give, viz. that he was the perfect ecclesiastic—as he sat witnessing the revels, now disturbed, now careless—there was the Churchman revealed; he was not, as was the case with so many others, a performer robed in clerical garb.

Of Miss Terry's Queen Katherine, it can be said that it was an *astonishing* performance, and took even her admirers by surprise. She made the same almost gigantic effort as she did in 'Macbeth' to interpret a vast character, one that might have seemed beyond her strength, physical as well as mental. By sheer force of will and genius she contrived to triumph. It

was not, of course, the *great* Queen Catherine of Mrs. Siddons, nor did she awe and command all about her ; but such earnestness and reality and dramatic power did she impart to the character that she seemed to supply the absence of greater gifts. Her performance in the Court and other scenes of the persecuted, hunted woman, now irritated, now resigned, was truly pathetic and realistic. There may have been absent the overpowering, queen-like dignity, the state and heroism, but it was impossible to resist her—it was her “way,” and by this way she gained all hearts. It must be confessed that nothing ever supplied such an idea of the talents and “cleverness” of this truly brilliant woman as her victory over the tremendous difficulties of these parts. The performance won her the sympathies of all in an extraordinary degree.

So admirably had our manager been penetrated with the spirit of the scenes, that he was enabled to present them in a natural and convincing way, and seemed to revive the whole historic time and meaning of the situation. This was particularly shown in the scene when Buckingham is led to execution, and whose address to the crowd was delivered with so natural a fashion, with such judicious and pathetic effect, that it not only gained admiration for the performance, but brought the scene itself within range of every-day life. For, instead of the old conventional declamatory speech to a stage crowd, we had some “words” which the sufferer, on entering the boat, chanced to address to sympathizers who met him on the way.

The music, the work of a young composer, Mr. Edward German, was truly romantic, and expressive; stately, and richly-coloured. How wonderful, by the way, is the progress made of late years in theatrical music! We have now a group of composers who expend their talents and elegancies in the adornment of the stage. The flowing melodies and stately marches of the Lyceum music still linger in the ear.

It was on January 6, 1892, when he was performing in 'Henry VIII.,' that a very alarming piece of news, much magnified by report, reached him. His son Laurence was playing at Belfast in the Benson Company, and had by some accident shot himself with a revolver; this casualty was exaggerated to an extraordinary degree,—three local doctors issued bulletins; "the lung had been pierced,"—until the anxious father at last sent over an experienced surgeon, Mr. Lawson Tait, who was able to report that the wound was trivial, and the weapon a sort of "toy-pistol." Much sympathy was excited by this casualty. The manager has two sons, Henry and Laurence, the latter named after Mr. Toole, and who are now both following their father's profession.

CHAPTER XX.

1892.

‘KING LEAR’—‘BECKET.’

AFTER presenting so many of Shakespeare's great dramas, it was to be expected that the manager could not well pass by what has been justly styled the Titanic play of ‘King Lear.’ This had, indeed, always been in his thoughts; but he naturally shrank from the tremendous burden it entailed. It was prepared in his usual sumptuous style. There were sixteen changes of scene and twenty-two characters, and the music was furnished by Hamilton Clarke. The scenery was divided between Craven and Harker, the latter a very effective artist of the same school. There were some beautiful romantic effects: the halls, the heath, and notably the Dover scenes, were exquisite.¹

¹ With every new piece at the Lyceum there is more and more recourse to the good old system of “cloths,” which offers the painter far better opportunities than does the modern method of “built-up” scenery. In one of the fine interiors in ‘Lear’ the roof was supported by columns painted on the flat with much vividness, and quite deceiving the eye with the imitation of rounded surfaces. Some years ago these would all have been modelled.

I doubt if their presentation has been excelled by any preceding attempts. The barbaric tone and atmosphere of the piece was conveyed to perfection, without being insisted on or emphasized. It is only when we compare the ambitious attempts of other managers who would indulge in effects equally lavish and sumptuous, that we recognize the respect, ease, reserve, and taste of the Lyceum manager.¹ They, too, will have their "archæology" and their built-up temples, designed by painters of repute, and crowds; but there is present the sense of stage effect and the flavour of the supernumerary. The secret is the perfect subordination of such details to the general effect. These should be, like the figures on a tapestry, indistinct, but effective as a background. Charles Lamb's well-worn dictum, that 'Lear' should never be acted, was made to figure in every criticism. There is some truth in this exaggerated judgment, because it can never be *adequately* presented, and the performance must always fall short of the original grandeur. With his remarks on the pettiness of

¹ To illustrate his most recent productions, the manager is accustomed to issue what is called "a souvenir," a charmingly artistic series of pictures of the scenes, groupings, etc. It may be added, as a proof of the pictorial interest of the Lyceum productions, that in little more than a week after the first performance of 'Becket,' no less than five-and-twenty illustrations, some of great pretension, had appeared. On the first night of 'Lear' a marchioness, of artistic tastes, was seen making sketches, which were published in an evening paper. I myself possess literally thousands of pictures of the Lyceum plays, collected in ten large folios, with all the criticisms, "skits," caricatures, etc., that have appeared during the past twenty years—a remarkable tribute to the popularity of the actor.

the stage-storm, one would be inclined to agree, even on this occasion, where every art was exhausted to convey the notion of the turmoil of the elements. The truth is, an audience sitting in the stalls and boxes will never be seduced into accepting the rollings and crashings of cannon-balls aloft, and the flashing of leucopodium, as suggesting the awful warring of the elements.

'Lear' was brought forward on Thursday, Nov. 10, 1892, and its presentation was a truly romantic one. The figure had little of the usual repulsive aspects of age—the clumsy white beard, etc.—but was picturesque. The entry into his barbaric court, the strange retainers with their head-dresses of cows' horns, was striking and original. The whole conception was human. The "curse" was delivered naturally. In presenting, however, the senile ravings of the old monarch, the actor unavoidably assumed an indistinctness of utterance, and many sentences were lost. This imperfection was dwelt on in the criticisms with superfluous iteration, and though the actor speedily amended and became almost emphatically distinct, this notion seemed to have settled in the public mind, with some prejudice to the success of the piece. Though he was thus quick to remedy this blemish, distinctness was secured by deliberation, and at some loss of effect. The actor's extraordinary exertions—for he was at the same time busy with the preparation of a new piece—exhausted him, and obliged him for some nights to entrust the part to another. But the real obstacle to full success could be found in the general lugubrious

tone of the character ; the uninterrupted sequence of horrors and distresses led to a feeling of monotony difficult for the actor to vanquish. The public never takes very cordially to pieces in which there is this *sustained misery*, though it can relish the alternations of poignant tragedy attended by quick dramatic changes. Cordelia, though a small part, was made prominent by much touching pathos and grace, and the dying recognition by the old King brought tears to many eyes.¹

An interesting feature in Irving's career has been his long friendship with Tennyson, so lately passed away. This had lasted for some fifteen or sixteen years, and the actor showed his appreciation of the poet's gifts by the rather hazardous experiment of presenting two of his poetical dramas to the public. We have seen what sumptuous treatment was accorded to 'The Cup'; and in 'Queen Mary' the actor contributed his most powerful dramatic efforts in the realization of the grim Philip.

The poet, however, made little allowance for the

¹ One touch, which might escape the superficial, showed the fine, delicate sense of the manager. The scene where Kent is exhibited in the stocks has always suggested something grotesque and prosaic. It was here so dignified in its treatment as to become almost pathetic. I may add here that the deepest strokes of Shakespeare, not being on the surface, are apt to escape us altogether, save when some inspired critic lays his finger on them. The faithful Kent at the close is brought to his master's notice, who does not recognize him. Here Lamb points out how noble is Kent's self-sacrifice—no bringing himself to the King's recollection.

exigencies of the stage. During the preparation of 'The Cup,' he contended eagerly for the retention of long speeches and scenes, which would have shipwrecked the piece. Yet, undramatic as most of his dramas are, a taste for them is springing up, and not long before his death he had the gratification of knowing that his 'Foresters' had met with surprising success in America. No less than six pieces of his have been produced, and though the idea prevails that he has been "a failure" as a dramatist, it will be found that on the whole he has been successful. It may be that by and by he will be in high favour. But he will have owed much to Irving, not merely for presenting his plays with every advantage, but for putting them into fitting shape and with firm, unerring touch removing all that is superfluous.

So far back as the year 1879 the poet had placed in Irving's hands a drama on the subject of Becket and the Fair Rosamund. It was really a *poem* of moderate length, though in form a drama, and the actor naturally shrank from the difficulties of dealing with such a piece. The "pruning knife" would here have been of little avail, the axe or "chopper" would have to be used unsparingly. The piece accordingly was laid aside for that long period; the lamented death of the poet probably removed the chief obstacle to its production. It is said, indeed, that almost one-half was removed before it could be put in shape for performance. On Monday, Feb. 6, 1893, the actor's birthday, this posthumous piece was brought out with every ad-

vantage, and before an assemblage even more brilliant than usual.¹ It revived the memories of the too recent 'Henry VIII.,' in which there is much the same struggle between Prince and Bishop. The actor has thus no less than three eminent Catholic ecclesiastics in his *répertoire*—Richelieu, Wolsey, and Becket ; but, as he pleasantly said, he could contrast with these an English clergyman, the worthy Dr. Primrose, Vicar of Wakefield. Yet he admirably and dramatically distinguished their several characters. 'Becket' contained thirty characters, and was set off by fine scenery and excellent music, written specially by Professor Stanford, this not being the first time his notes were associated with the poet. Never have Irving's efforts been greeted with such overpowering, tumultuous applause. At the end of every act there were no less than five "recalls." In such pieces, as well as in some of Shakespeare's, there is always a matter of interesting debate in fixing the era, dresses, architecture, etc.—a matter perhaps

¹ In this year of grace the rage for being present at these *premières* has mounted to an extravagant pitch. In spite of there being some four or five theatres directed by actor-managers—each inaugurating a new piece with one of these showy gatherings—the passion for obtaining invitations has become devouring. "The fact is," wrote one of our foremost actor-managers to me, "the 'first night' craze has reached such a pitch that the clerks get off their heads, and sometimes forget to keep seats for those who have every right to be present." Some claimants are even indignant when "put off" with stalls where a box is expected. The liberality of the managers is the more noteworthy, when it is considered that the places could be disposed of at a premium over and over again, and to this complexion we may have to come by and by.

of less importance than is supposed. Irving's conception of Becket was truly picturesque and romantic; he imported a pathetic tone, with a sort of gloomy foreboding of the impending martyrdom, conveyed by innumerable touches. The actor has the art of moulding his features and expression to the complexion of the character he is performing nightly. Thus, in 'Becket,' it can be seen that he has already assumed the meditative, wary look of the aspiring ecclesiastic.

One of the most remarkable things connected with 'Becket' was the unanimous applause and approbation of the entire press.¹ Even one or two evening papers, which had spoken with a little hesitation, returned to the subject a few nights later to correct their judgment and to admit that they had been hasty. All confessed that they had been captivated by the picturesqueness of the central figure.²

¹ On March 18, 1893, Irving and his whole company were bidden to Windsor Castle to play 'Becket' before her Majesty. A theatre was fitted up in the Waterloo Chamber; special scenery was painted; the Lyceum was closed; and the company, 170 strong, was transported to Windsor and brought back on the same night. The performance was given with much effect and to the enjoyment of the Queen. Some three or four years before, a no less interesting entertainment was arranged at Sandringham by the Prince of Wales, who was anxious that her Majesty should see the two favourite performers in their most effective pieces—'The Bells' and the "Trial scene" in 'The Merchant of Venice.' The outlay of time, trouble, and skilful management to provide for all the arrangements within a short space of time can scarcely be imagined. The pecuniary cost, owing to the closing of the theatre, transport, etc., was serious.

² "Just as the drama," my friend, Mr. Bendall, that acute and

Apart from his professional gifts, Irving is assuredly one of those figures which fill the public eye, and of which there are but few. This is owing to a sort of sympathetic attraction and to an absence of affectation. He plays many parts in the social scheme, and always does so with judiciousness, contributing to the effect of the situation. His utterances on most subjects are thoughtful and well considered, and contribute to the enlightenment of the case. On his examination by the London County Council, when many absurd questions were put to him, he answered with much sagacity. His views on the employment of children in theatres show good sense. More remarkable, however, are his opinions on the science of acting, the art of management and of dealing with audiences and other kindred topics, which show much thought and knowledge. He has, in truth, written a great deal, and his various "discourses," recently collected in a pretty little volume, do credit to his literary style and power of expression.¹

moderate critic, says, "in spite of its technical flaws, proves able to catch and hold the sympathetic interest of its audience, so the central figure is found to be capable in Mr. Irving's hand not merely of explanation but of vivid realization as one of the most impressive and convincing embodiments of historical character ever seen upon the stage. In both cases, it may be noted, the triumph is distinctively that of the much-decried actor-manager, for under no *régime* other than his is it possible to conceive these results attained behind the footlights with this singularly unequal product of a poet's fancy."

¹ An Irving "Bibliography" would fill many columns, and would include a vast quantity of controversial writing—attacks, defences, and

Here we must pause, for we have followed our actor-manager through his many-sided and picturesque career down to his last successful effort. He is now, as I said, preparing for yet another visit to the United States and for an absence from his own theatre of nearly a year. Our review, therefore, fitly closes at this point.

We have seen what he has done, what a vast change he has worked in the condition of the stage : what an elegant education he has furnished during fifteen years. And though he has been associated with the revival of the stage, and a complete reform in all that concerns its adornment, it will be his greatest glory that he has presented SHAKESPEARE on a grand

discussions. Besides his official discourses, he has written many agreeable papers in the leading "monthlies." I have already spoken of the "skits" and personalities which followed his early successes, and which he encountered with excellent temper and a patient shrug. These have long since been forgotten. At attempts at "taking him off," though a favourite pastime, he could afford to smile ; though when it was carried beyond legitimate bounds, as in the instance of the late Mr. Leslie, he interposed with quiet firmness, and put it down in the interests of the profession. An American burlesque actor, named Dixie, with execrable taste gave an imitation of him in his presence. More curious is the unconscious imitation of him which is gaining in the ranks of the profession, and which has had some droll results. Thus one Hudson—when playing the Tetrarch in 'Claudian' in the States—was so strangely like him in manner and speech, that it was assumed by the American audience that he was maliciously "taking him off." His own company have caught up most of his "ways" and fashions—notably Haviland, and even Alexander. At the opening of 'Vanderdecken,' two at least of the performers were mistaken for him—from their walk—and had a "reception" accordingly.

scale, under the sumptuous and judicious conditions and methods that have made the poet acceptable to English audiences of our day.

I cannot, however, conclude without making some reflections on the policy and principles of this brilliant system of management ; and on the question how far it is likely to help the interests of the stage. It is admitted that the successful direction of the Lyceum has given importance to what is called actor-management. Much could be said on both sides of this interesting question ; but there can be no doubt that, under present conditions, it is the only practical method of regulating a theatre. Nearly all great managers—Garrick, Kemble, Macready, Charles Kean, Irving—have been actor-managers. No doubt the manager's office is distinct from that of the actor ; but the combination of the two functions can be traced to the reign of incapable managers, who are ignorant of the public taste, the arts of play-writing, and of fitting actors with suitable parts. In our time, it is accepted that any journeyman may take and direct a theatre. His simple method is to imitate anything that has succeeded, or to engage such actors as may be fairly popular. But the manager-actor supplies at least the dramatic instincts ; and by the aid of his own pervading personality excites the public interest. As he is actor-

manager, director, and generally a person of mark in his private capacity, he succeeds in imparting a fitting tone to the whole ; and makes the dramatic element, as it should be, prominent. The public is certain to be attracted by such a personality, rather than by a system, or by an invisible, ignorant personage. The example set by Irving is now being largely followed, and at St. James's and Haymarket Theatres the persons of Alexander and Beerbohm Tree are more *en évidence* than the theatres themselves. This, I think, fairly explains the evolution of the actor-manager as we have it now-a-days, and who has become all but necessary.

But there is another question suggested by this review, viz. how far should this system of sumptuous adornment be carried in the setting forth Shakespearian plays upon the stage, and what should be the limits of this treatment ? Limits there must be ; as from repetition and familiarity such splendid effects will gradually cease to attract or be accepted as a matter of course. Yet it is impossible to go on in a *crescendo* of magnificent decoration. At the same time it must be admitted that no other system than the Lyceum one would be found acceptable at present. The public requires show and sumptuousness, and these things it will have. What is wanted is surely some *scientific* principles which shall be constant and invariable, and these I intend to investigate shortly, by way of academic discussion.

In an ideal revival of a Shakespearian play, the first

guiding principle is to be found in the largeness and *generality* of the Bard himself. He disdains to deal with particulars; his scenes are often unnamed, as though it did not matter where they took place: it was enough that they occurred upon this earth. Thus the theatrical ideal of "a church" should not be an interior built up laboriously with pillars, arches, etc., but a something mistily suggestive of a church—such as a person takes away with him of a church after passing through some crisis. As Elia laid it down, the real scene should be and is only all *that the eye can take in* at such a moment of excitement.¹ Thus, a person who witnesses a crisis in a room or in a public street or square, will only note the barest essentials of what is about him, and only recall that he was in a large or a small room, or in a church, or in "a street" generally. The details are immaterial. It would not be difficult to work out a system of scenery on this principle.

Another objection to elaborate adornment is that the glare of illumination in which the stage is now bathed, still further impairs the emphasis and weight of what is seen and spoken. There is no relief, and no prominence, where all is in the full flood of light. The eye is distracted, and the important figures are lost in crowds of other figures and confused by the glittering costumes. Their utterances, too, lose point and distinctness for the same reason; for, if the eye be

¹ I may refer the reader for the development of this theory to my little work, *The Art of the Stage*, where it is fully discussed.

distracted, the attention of the ear also wanders. In the true Shakespearian revival, after ideal principles, instead of loading the piece with rich adornments and accessories, there should be the greatest reserve. The principle of the scenery should be to carry out in the simplest way only *just so much as is required by the text.*

Again, dresses, scenery, and built-up constructions all seem unnecessary, save in a sort of negative sense. No advantage is gained by an archæological accuracy in dress. The old, well-painted pictures, the mezzotints and prints of Hamlet in a black Court suit of the day, and Mrs. Pritchard in powder and ruffs, never seem to me so incongruous after all. The truth is, Hamlet is *any* prince, and the King and Queen *any* king or queen; just as in some of the old French plays we have for characters, The Marquis, The Count, with Clitandre, Alceste, and such names. I believe that the true canon for dress is that it should be indicated, not "expressed in fancy," and generalized, just as character on the stage should be. When the stage is filled with figures richly attired in Italian suits, gaudy plushes and satins, etc., it irresistibly suggests something of a fancy ball. With sober, unostentatious suit and moderate lighting the figures are far more dramatic and illusionary.

Built-up scenery, too, we would have none of for our legitimate revival. In presence of one of these elaborate "sets," we may always ask ourselves the question, "Could not the same result, the same relief,

be produced by simple, effective painting?" If we reflect on it, no fresh dramatic effect is gained by "practicable" doors, or by great flights of real stairs, and such things. In life and in serious situations no one thinks of these things. A crisis has taken place in a room—the agitated witness never recalls the process of his entering or leaving the room—the essence is that he was there and came away. The actor "comes on the scene" and goes off the scene, it does not matter how. The vice of such contrivances, as is well known, is curiously shown by the fact that they now actually control the construction of the drama, which is subservient to *them*, and which is contracted into three or four scenes—that is, acts—besides affecting all the details. When by desperate efforts numerous changes of scene are made, the labour and exertion is palpable and destroys the effect. With an old system of "cloths," everything runs smoothly, and we can have the succession of scenes which supply variety. Many of the scenes in Shakespeare are of the most trivial sort; they are, as it were, mere parenthesis or explanation, and the actors should treat them in the same spirit. Here, of course, I have not space to furnish the methods by which such a system could be developed.

It is the custom, not an unnatural one, for the average manager, when organizing a Shakespearian revival, to magnify and develop certain episodes which the Bard had merely touched, *en passant* as it were. Now so much of real importance is wrapped up in

these great dramas, that any enlargement of this kind destroys the balance and proportions. At the opening of 'Romeo and Juliet' there is the little scuffle between the factions. Now the "revivalist," or his stage-manager, who is eagerly anxious to adorn his Shakespeare, and do him honour, sees here his opportunity. It is an opening for effect, for "business." Here is a quarrel in the streets of old Verona; it could be worked up into a regular *scene*; he could have the crowds rushing on from all the alleys, a regular Italian battle royal, with "local colour," windows opening and the alarmed inhabitants looking out, etc. All this was actually contrived by the late Lewis Wingfield when Miss Anderson revived the play. And yet, when we look at the text, it was nothing more than a scuffle, a street quarrel, such as might take place in the Seven Dials. Here it became a regular insurrection.

In the same way how artificial and ineffective is the invariable method of processions, courts, armies, and the rest. For a modern Shakespeare revival there is a regular, inflexible formula; an actual pride is taken in the vast numbers of supernumeraries engaged, which, it is assumed, are absolutely necessary to add to the imposing effect. In the early scene in 'Hamlet,' after some due trumpeting, the "Court" enters, with pages, lords, etc., who walk round *secundum artem*; the King and Queen coming in last with *their crowns on*. This always seemed monotonous, conventional, and unnatural. There is no ground for supposing that the thing was

done in this way ; nay, the impression is that personages who could indulge in this formal exhibition could scarcely be ripe or ready for the serious business of the piece. I do not profess to lay down *how* this should be arranged ; but it is certain that by the study of human nature and of the analogy of modern courts, a much more dramatic arrangement could be contrived. To regulate these retainers, soldiers, pages, etc., who stand round in symmetrical rows, vacantly gazing, and listening to the conversation, a principle may be applied, viz. to find out what is the *essence*—that is, what amount of attendance is necessary for the interpretation of the scene. It is curious that mere numbers do not suggest the idea of numbers, on the stage ; were the whole stage crammed with men engaged in fighting, the idea would not be given of an army, but only of a large room filled with men. The principle is to suggest *the idea* of numbers. The fewest would have the best effect ; any figures introduced beyond what is required legitimately by the characters only confuse and distract. They seem intruders. Above all, not being actors, and yet being put to act, their wandering looks and undramatic bearing reveal them as what they really are—persons out of the streets—and disagreeably remind us of the unreality of the whole. Concentration of interest is best obtained by leaving the leading figures with full space about them, and unencumbered by this crowd of attendants.

There is a stately mezzotint of Kemble as Hamlet, after Sir T. Lawrence's fine picture. It portrays him

in his graceful suit and sables, and flowing cloak ; he holds the skull in his hand, and his noble head and eyes are turned upwards. This figure always seems to me to embody the whole spirit and action of the churchyard scene. In him, as he stands, is concentrated the suggestions of Ophelia, and the gravediggers, etc. We hardly want the church in the background, or the grave cut in the boards, or the processions, or the strains of the organ from the church. Those realistic and prosaic details interpose between us and the grandeur of the situation. The central idea that comprises everything is the racked soul of Hamlet himself. With this principle before us, we can devise a sort of reserved form of adornment, in every point subservient to the central figure, without anything that shall impair its effect. In short, we might almost find something of these principles in the familiar, oft-quoted saying, that "a well-dressed man is a man of whose dress you do not take notice." So a suitably-mounted play is one whose decorations and adornments do not excite your attention.

Our manager has ever been guided in his enterprise, not by whims or humours, but by fixed principles, which he has steadily worked out with intelligence and purpose. In a short paper in the *Theatre*, he deals with the question of management, which he has thoroughly studied, and the apparently inconsistent concessions which a manager, like Goethe, was compelled to make to the public. He lays it down that to aim at an ideal which shall be above, and beyond, public

taste, is in practice quite impossible, and would only end in disaster. The principle is to be summed up in the oft-quoted "Those who live to please, must please to live." But, at the same time, while the manager lives by pleasing, he can also insensibly and artfully, it may be, teach his public, or suggest to it, what *ought* to please it.

The manager, like the "roaster," is born, not made—*On naît Directeur*. It is an extraordinary instinct, capable of development by experience and study. How rare and valuable this gift is we learn by the few instances there are of genuine managers; and what disasters attend the experiments of the spurious manager we can learn from the experience of even the past few years. How innumerable are the instances of blunderers rushing in, seizing on a theatre, and at once exhibiting the most surprising and ludicrous ignorance of what is likely to suit the public, choosing the wrong play, the wrong actor, the wrong house! This knowledge of "what will suit" is an inspiration. The real management is indeed not so much of the theatre as of the audience and the public. The true artist can learn to detect this real taste, which may be concealed from the public itself even; and he will contrive to direct that taste for its own advantage. It would almost seem indeed that the old French word "*mesnager*"—manager was originally so spelt—implied this very idea, for *ménager* signifies to humour, or gently guide.

The choosing of a play is one of the nicest and most

delicate tasks. There is some strange mystery in the presence of an audience, and there is a language which only the skilfully-inspired can know. The play that is read in private rehearsals, or in private, is a totally different thing from the same play tendered to a crowded house. This, the ignorant manager cannot discriminate; nor can even the practised actor who has turned manager. The gift is indeed something similar to that of the sagacious political agent who sees, long before the people see, what questions are becoming "ripe," "what will do," etc. The manager must know human nature well, must observe and study the currents of public thought. A subsidiary gift is to pierce below the surface, to see that something apparently unsuitable will really "go down." It is so with the choice of the actors. He will discover gifts and capabilities for a particular part, undeveloped, and which the performer himself even does not suspect. We have only to compare the skilled manager with his fellows to recognize this truth.

There have been many laments over the fleeting, evanescent character of the actor's efforts. If his success be triumphant, it is like a dream for those who have not seen. Description gives but the faintest idea of his gifts. The writer, as it were, continues to write after his death, and is read as he was in his lifetime. But the player gone—the play is over. The actor, it is true, if he be a personality, has another audience outside his theatre. As I have shown in these pages, he can attract by force of character

the interest and sympathies of the general community. Whatever he does, or wherever he appears, eyes are turned to him as they would be to a performer on a stage. There is a sort of indulgent partiality in the case of Irving. He is a dramatic figure, much as was Charles Dickens. "Eyes are idly bent on him that enters next." And this high position is not likely to be disturbed; and though all popularity is precarious enough, he has the art and tact to adapt his position to the shifty, capricious changes of taste, and in the hackneyed phrase is more "up to date" than any person of his time. The fine lines in 'Troilus and Cressida'—the most magnificent in Shakespeare, as they seem to me—should ring in every actor's ear, or indeed of every one that enjoys favour. Alas! it must be his lot to be ever at the oar. There is no relaxing, no repose; no coy retirement, or yielding to importunate rivalry:

"To have done, is to hang quite out of fashion,
 Like a rusty mail in monumental mockery. . . .
 For honour travels in a strait so narrow,
 Where one but goes abreast: keep, then, the path;
 For emulation hath a thousand sons,
 That one by one pursue: if you give way,
 Or turn aside from the direct forth-right,
 Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,
 And leave you hindmost;—and there you lie
 Like a gallant horse fallen in first rank,
 For pavement to the abject rear, o'er-run
 And trampled on: then, what they do in present,
 Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours."

With these noble lines resounding in our ears, I will conclude this imperfect record of a brilliant career.

NOTES.

I.

PROPERTIES AT THE LYCEUM.

THE thorough, minute fashion in which everything is provided for "behind-scenes" at the Lyceum is shown in the following description taken from Mr. T. P. O'Connor's paper, *The Weekly Sun*. For every well-mounted piece there is drawn what is called a "property plot," or guide to the time, place, and uses of all the objects required in the piece. Here is the property plot of 'Becket'—

"PROLOGUE.

"SCENE 1.—Tapestry curtains over door, P.S.

"SCENE 2.—Platform, fountain, rustic trellis-work and poles with vine, P.S. ; gold salver and fruit gold salver, two goblets and jug on wall, P.C. ; jewelled cross for Queen ; chess-table and men, O.P.C. ; chairs with cushions each side of table ; small stool behind table ; plan of bower.

"ACT I.

"SCENE 1.—Reading-desk with candle alight, and missal and stool, set on trap ; crosier (one pull for trap to sink).

"SCENE 2.—Sticks for Becket's and King's men.

"SCENE 3.—Two lamps from flies ; canopy ; throne steps, with scarlet cover ; throne chair with cushion and footstool, P.S. ; rostrum seats, crimson covered, O.P. ; table, crimson cover ; on table :—bell stand, two inkhorns, one sandbox, taper stand with taper alight, large illuminated book, small bell hammer, large stick of sealing-wax, two

parchments (one in leather case), pieces of buff paper, half-dozen quill pens with pencils (ink) to mark ; eighteen stools ; sword of state and mace ; seven crosiers ; one wand ; cross for Becket behind centre door ; cross for York O.P.I. ; handles on all doors ; three banners on poles ; eight bannerettes on spears ; spears for soldiers ; organ.

“ACT II.

Grass stage cloth ; bank with three rose trees, O.P. ; large bank, O.P.C., with steps O.P. and front ; sun-dial on bank (bank covered with flowers) ; large set tree, P.S. ; gold-embroidered cloth on tree ; silk cloth on stage ; basket of coloured wools at foot of tree ; book and basket of flowers ; ball for Geoffrey on steps ; stump of tree, O.P. ; large crimson and gold tapestry leading into bower ; large crimson and gold canopy at entrance to bower ; embroidered rug lying at entrance to bower ; lamp ; lines from flies for canopy and lamp ; bunch of blue-bells for Margery ; blue-bells on bank for Margery to pluck.

“ACT III.

“SCENE 1.—Table O.P. covered with gold and cerise ; cross and hour-glass on table ; two chairs with cushions, P.S. ; crimson and gold rug in front of chairs ; two orange trees behind chairs ; small cross for Becket ; three banners ; four bannerettes on long spears ; two flags ; long spears for English soldiers ; short spears ; four short bannerettes and one flag for French soldiers ; ten shields for English soldiers.

“SCENE 2.— ———

“SCENE 3.—Repeat of Act 2 ; a phial, dagger for Queen.

“ACT IV.

“SCENE 1.—As Scene 1, prologue ; cross ; double of cross in bower to be thrown on stage.

“SCENE 2.—Bed and iron box on trap to sink at cue ; casket in iron box containing stole ; missal ; mattress, pillows, rush and two grey rugs on bed ; cross on bed ; large doors with bolts and handles, P.S. ; iron plate off stage, P.S. ; large chain on plate ; two large mallets : vesper bell ; organ.

“SCENE 3.—Large column, centre ; one column, P.S., and one ditto, O.P. ; two candlesticks on altar, and red lamp over in chapel, O.P. ;

two lamps between columns at back ; two small lamps over figures at P.S., wings back ; three horn lanthorns ; thunder and lightning at cue ; four hatchets."

"Stage properties," goes on the writer, who visited all the departments, "must needs be light, portable, and durable. *Papier-maché* answers all these requirements, and is used very extensively. On the uppermost floor of the Lyceum Theatre is a modelling-room, whence an immense variety of work is turned out. There, in one corner, is the capital of one of the huge columns used in 'Becket' ; there a cauldron that did duty in 'Faust' ; there a bust of some hero of the French Revolution that figured in 'The Dead Heart.' All these are fashioned out of *papier-maché*. The process of their manufacture is as follows :—First of all, a model is built up of damp clay. Then a cast is taken in plaster, which is allowed to dry. This is greased, and an ingenious preparation of moist paper is pressed into it and withdrawn, and hardened in a large gas furnace. The uses of this material are innumerable. It can be coloured like marble, as in the case of a statue, but if it falls it does not break, being extremely elastic. It can be built up on a foundation of wood, and a solid-looking structure of carved stone is produced, that can yet be carried about with the utmost ease. The great arch in 'Faust' was an admirable specimen of this. Cover your *papier-maché* with tinsel and it becomes a helmet, most martial in appearance, but as light as a feather on the head of the actor.

"Near this room is an apartment wherein tapestry and curtains, of which there is a most valuable collection at the Lyceum, are made and stored. Here Mr. Terriss's coat of mail is under repair, and the visitor learns *en passant* that it consists of no fewer than 3000 metal scales. In the tapestry-room, too, an artist has temporarily established himself to manufacture a missal for Becket. It proves upon examination to be a dull religious treatise that has been chosen because it happened to be bound in parchment and printed in large, old-faced type. Each page has been stained a faint brown, while here and there the artist is painting a bold initial letter in gold and vermilion, that could in hardly any circumstances be visible to the eyes of the audience—certainly never to the naked eye.

"There is a series of 'storied windows, richly dight,' that would cast a 'dim religious light,' were they in a position to do so. They are

actually made of silk stretched on wooden frames and painted with transparent oils.

“Yorick's skull is a property that the curious visitor naturally asks for. It proves, for once, to be the genuine article, and no *papier-maché* counterfeit. It is ready to hand, for it rather recently made its reappearance in the study of Doctor Faustus. It is, in fact, a well-worn skull, that shines, from much handling, with a grisly sheen; and has even had to have a crack or two mended with tender surgery. While Yorick's skull is in hand one is shown, too, Hamlet's rapier in its velvet case, his books in their beautiful binding of silver filigree work, and the 'records' of the players. Here is the dispatch-box that has been ripped open so often in the 'Lyons Mail.' It is still full of papers. There is the account-book, with its tape and seals renewed every night, and a bundle of bank-notes. They are exact reproductions, on bank-note paper, of twenty-franc notes, but they prove upon examination to be drawn on the 'Banque de Lyceum,' the signature of the *secrétaire-général* being that of Mr. H. J. Loveday, who, as the stage-manager, so admirably carries out Mr. Irving's ideas. What looks at a distance like a Bank of England note proves to be drawn on the 'Royal Lyceum Bank,' and reads:—'I promise to perform to the public visiting this bank, to the best of my ability every evening, or forfeit ten pounds, or as many rounds of applause. By my own order, Rigdum Funnibus.'

“It is a rule of the place that nothing shall be sold or destroyed which can by any possibility be used again. It is also a rule of the place that no emergency justifies inaccuracy, and hardly any property in the Lyceum collection has done duty in two productions. For instance, the spinning-wheel used in 'The Bells' is altogether different from that used in 'Faust.' Whereby hangs a tale. A valuable antique spinning-wheel was imported from Germany for Marguerite's use; but its manipulation proved on trial to be so intricate that the genuine machine had to be replaced by a mere property, exactly like the original in appearance.

“To return to our armoury: several suits of armour stand on blocks. They are mostly mementoes of the production of 'Henry VIII.,' which caused a liberal addition to the Lyceum armoury. In 'Henry VIII.' there were used no fewer than three suits of plate-mail. In 'Lear' sixty suits of scale armour are used. A splendid suit of Roman armour, in

burnished brass, worn in 'The Cup,' dates back, as to its manufacture, to the Exhibition of 1851, where it bore away the first prize as a specimen of the armourer's work. A suit of beautifully-chased steel worn by the Duc de Nemours came from Paris, as most of the armour worn in 'Richelieu' did. There is the splendid encasement of a Burgundian knight, and there the armour of a Scottish guard. In pointing out to you the difference between the sombre armour of Cromwell's forces and the bright steel of the Royalist trappings, the custodian of this room recalls the artistic exactions of Mr. Seymour Lucas. 'A very keen eye for a rivet had Mr. Lucas. Solder would have done very well, seeing that the armour had not to stand real fighting. But Mr. Lucas must have it riveted; and what is more, riveted in the proper place.' Nothing could better exemplify the care bestowed on a Lyceum production than the rack of halberds. It has happened that halberds have been needed for many recent productions, and a different set has been prepared for each, although the difference in the formation of one halberd and another is so slight that none but the practised eye could possibly detect it. The billhooks of the watchmen in 'Much Ado About Nothing' are here. Their heads might cheaply and conveniently have been fashioned of tin; but at a certain point in the play these billhooks had to clash with a clear, ringing sound, and so they must needs be wrought in iron. The firelocks used in 'Ravenswood' differ a little, but ever so little, from those used in 'The Dead Heart.' In the case of the latter a dreadful anachronism was perpetrated, that must have wrung Mr. Irving's heart. The weapons had to be fired, and so a tiny cartridge was inserted where the flint should be—for all the world like a modern breechloader. A large cupboard contains a perfectly wonderful collection of swords. There must be nearly a thousand, of every age and fashion, from the short Roman blade to the most modern of rapiers in a velvet case.

"The most interesting room of all is known as the "working-room," and is convenient to the stage. It is a room with a history, for it was once the green-room, and once the dressing-room of Madame Vestris. Here is stored everything in actual use. At the present moment it is full of 'Becket' properties and 'Lear' properties. It is during the performance under the care of a responsible man, who is supposed to know by heart everything it contains, and the use and occasion for

using each article. One by one he deals out the hundred and odd items to his men, who place them in their position on the stage, or hand them to the performers needing them."

All which is no doubt done in conscientious spirit, but, as I have pointed out in the text, is a waste of power, for such details are unappreciated. In real life, where the action is dramatic or exciting, there is no time or inclination to take note of such things.

II.

'BECKET.'

IT is evidence of the interest excited by 'Becket,' that a little discussion arose between a Benedictine Father and another ecclesiastic on the hymn, "Telluris ingens conditor," which was played in the cathedral scene and through the piece. The Benedictine contended that it must have been some older form of the hymn before the pseudo-classicalization "of the Breviary Hymns in the sixteenth century." "I do not suppose," he added, "that Mr. Irving's well-known attention to detail extends to such *minutiæ* as these. The famous cathedral scene, in his presentment of 'Much Ado about Nothing,' was received with a chorus of praise as a marvel of liturgical accuracy. But I am told, that to Catholic eyes at least some of its details appeared incorrect." Thus, to the monastery even, does the fame of our manager's efforts reach! It is true enough, as the Benedictine suggests, that such simulation of religious rites on the stage is unlikely to be faithful. It is forgotten that the ceremonies of the Catholic Church are not of the *essence*, and are as unstudied and careless as gestures are. No one who is not thoroughly imbued with Catholic feeling, doctrine, etc., can present a Catholic ecclesiastic on the stage. Hence the power and effect of Shakespeare's priests and prelates.

III.

POLL OF AMERICAN ACTORS.

THE opinions of these ladies and gentlemen, invited after a performance given for their special benefit, were as follows—

W. A. McConnell, manager of Haverly's Brooklyn Theatre, said—
"He is a great actor. That man must be who makes you forget

the personal disadvantages under which he labours. He has not physique, like McCullough, nor good looks, like Booth; he has certain mannerisms which would be blemishes if he was an ordinary actor. But how these things sink out of sight when he is on the stage, and what perfection of the stage management! It is a lesson for us all."

"As a manager," said Mr. Palmer, of the Union Square Theatre, "it was a revelation to me to see such conscientious attention to detail. Every little thing in which good stage management could have been exhibited was shown by Mr. Irving's company. They worked as one man. I have heard but one opinion among members of our company—everybody was delighted."

"I never saw such a perfect performance," said Miss Maude Harrison, enthusiastically. "I cannot find words to express my delight and wonder. He is a great, a very great, actor. And what a reception they gave him!"

Herr Mauthner, the *bon vivant* of the Thalia Theatre, said—"To me Mr. Irving is not a satisfactory actor. The grand outlines I look for in such a character as Louis XI. are, I think, completely obliterated by the redundancy of the details which Mr. Irving seems to revel in—details, moreover, which to my thinking often descend to mere tricks. Then, too, in scenes of passion Mr. Irving has recourse to gurgling sounds such as never issued from the throat of man. The stage management is discreet, artistic, and tasteful, and the influence of the Meininger troupe's visit to London easily traceable in all things."

"Mr. Irving is unquestionably *the greatest actor in the world*," ejaculated Mr. Theodore Moss. "But," he added, "I have never seen him on the stage, and my opinion of him is based solely on the box-office receipts."

"I have only one word to say on this subject," said Mr. John Gilbert, "and that is that it is wonderful; perhaps I however may supplement that by saying that it is 'extraordinary.' I have seen Mr. Irving play Louis XI. before to-day, and in fact I have attended nearly all his performances at the Star Theatre. But this afternoon he exceeded anything that he has done here before. He was clearly moved in no slight degree by the almost incessant applause of his professional brethren. I don't know that I remember having

seen a greater performance by any actor, not even excepting Macready's Werner. I am not astonished at Mr. Irving's great popularity in England. I am sure he deserves it. About his mannerisms? Well, I am sure they are unconquerable; they are a part of himself; they are not assumed. They are not seen at all in 'Louis XI.'

"I have never seen Mr. Irving before this afternoon," said Mr. James Lewis, "and I was certainly not disappointed, although I had formed the highest expectations of him as an actor. There was a young actor, about nineteen years old, that sat by me, and he got on his seat and yelled, 'Bravo!' Now, I didn't do that, but I was just as much pleased and excited as the youngster. I think it was the greatest performance I ever saw. You have, perhaps, heard the popular gag, 'That man tires me.' Well, that man, Mr. Irving, tired me, but it was because he so wrought upon my feelings that when the play was over I felt so exhausted that I could hardly leave my seat. The stage setting and management were good, but I have seen as good in this city before."

"Mr. Irving is the greatest actor I have ever seen," said Mr. Tony Pastor. "I have been to see him several times, and this is my opinion. It ain't bumcombe.. It comes from the heart. I've seen all the greatest actors."

Mr. McCormick, who was leading man with Clara Morris last season, and who has often played in 'Louis XI.,' said—"Our actors generally are not familiar with the play. The physiological phases of Irving's performance are worth every actor's study, yet I noticed that these were the bits least applauded. For instance, where he is told that Nemours is gone, he acts as I have never seen anybody but Edwin Forrest do before, yet the audience this afternoon failed to applaud the point."

"I have seen most of the performances in Europe of recent times," said Mme. Cottrelly, who had been a leading German actress and manager before appearing on the Casino stage, "but I have never seen anything that equalled Mr. Irving's performance this afternoon. I have never seen anything in the theatrical line that has been mounted more correctly. As I looked upon it I contrasted it with 'Francesca da Rimini,' and I think it surpassed it. I have never been more interested in any theatrical performance. It has not

been surpassed in the finest German court theatres that I have attended."

Mr. George Edgar said—"Mr. Irving impresses me as a man of infinite brain and imagination, and he appears to have thought out this character wonderfully. The impression I obtain is, 'How wonderfully clever!' Still, in dramatic action Mr. Irving does not impress me, and to me he is not magnetic."

Mr. Billy Birch, who was doubtless slyly taking in points for an after-piece, said—"Mr. Irving's performance is fine; *it's darned fine*. I knowed before I came here that he must be fine or he'd never get there. I sat it all out, and I tell you that man got there every time."

Mr. McCaull remarked with enthusiasm—"It's a long way the finest piece of character acting I have ever seen. Of course, I'm a young man and haven't seen much; but I've seen Mr. Irving twice in this part, and when I go to see a performance—out of my own theatre—twice, I can tell you that in my opinion it must be a very fine one."

"I am very familiar with 'Louis XI.," said Mr. Harry Edwards, "as I have played in it myself a great deal. I appeared as Nemours with Mr. Gustavus V. Brooke, and his performance of Louis XI. for his stamp was a very fine one. I then travelled for a year with Charles Kean, and played Cortier the Physician in 'Louis XI.," and once appeared with Kean as Cortier. I also played Nemours with Charles Couldock. Well, I say all this to show you that I am pretty familiar with the play and great actors that have played 'Louis XI.' Mr. Irving's Louis XI. is one of the greatest performances I have ever seen as a whole and far superior to any of his predecessors. He brings depth, more intensity and more variety to the character than any of them. His facial action is something wonderful. His performance stands on the highest plane of dramatic excellence and on the same plane as Macready's famous Werner. I may say that I am not an admirer of Mr. Irving in all parts, but his Louis XI. is unapproachable. I never enjoyed a performance so much in my life, and I felt that I could sit it out for a week if I were given the opportunity."

"*He is the greatest actor who breathes the English language,*" said Mr. Lewis Morrison. "I claim to know what good acting is. I

